

## ‘Kondopoga’ – Ethnic/Social Tension in Putin’s Russia

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The end of Putin’s presidency – or at least what one could regard as the end of his presidency – was marked by several major riots between ethnic Russians and people from the Caucasus of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. ‘Caucasians’ are usually seen as awry by the majority of Russians. Chechens are often singled out as the symbol of all the negative effects that the presence of ‘Caucasians’ and, in fact, all minorities, brings with it: domination of the market, crime, and changes in the demographic/cultural balance of the country. In more general terms, ‘Caucasians,’ especially Chechens, have coalesced in the minds of many Russians as responsible for all the ills of the post-Soviet era and which have continued through Putin’s tenure. There is increasing social as well as regional division. In fact, the gap between prosperous Moscow and a few other big cities and the small towns and cities and rural areas of the Russian heartland continues to be quite wide. All of this social and social/regional tension has manifested itself not so much in social/class animus, as was the case at the beginning of the 20th century, but in increasing ethnic tension. This has led to several major ethnic riots in the last years of Putin’s tenure, with those in Kondopoga, a small city in Karelia in the northern part of European Russia, as the best known. These riots, in which hundreds of people were involved, left several dead, and many injured. They received much coverage in the Russian press and stuck in the mind of the public as few events in recent Russian history have done. While, in themselves, the Kondopoga events have not led to any major upheaval, their occurrence indicates the serious tension in Russian society, which plays an important role in the case of major crises. The Kondopoga violence also indicates that Russia has the same problems as most countries of the West, which recently have experienced changes in demographic and social/cultural composition due to waves of immigrants, mostly from non-European countries.

### **The demographic shift**

The violence in Kondopoga and other regions of the country is a manifestation of a variety of social/ethnic ills. The increase of non-Slavic minorities in various regions of Russia, where they had barely been seen before, created for ethnic Russians visible symbols of their problems. The flow of ethnic minorities, including those from the Caucasus, to the Russian heartland started accelerating at the end of the Gorbachev era, when the Russian heartland remained much more stable than the empire's outskirts. To be sure, the heartland was not absolutely peaceful. As happened all over the former USSR, and crime had increased rapidly in the heartland too. Still, organized banditry was comparatively rare, and there was not much ethnic violence, if any, unlike in Central Asia and especially the Caucasus. Therefore, it was not surprising that increasing numbers of people from that area came to the Russian heartland in search of a safe place. For example, Armenians came to Rzhev, a small city in the Russian heartland, in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> As in other parts of the Russian heartland, and in the Russian North too, the number of 'Caucasians' has grown steadily over the last few years. The first groups of Chechens had come to Karelia already in the 1960s. These Chechens had been assimilated and were pretty much integrated in the local community. The locals approached these Chechens positively and regretted that they were treated in the same way as newcomers during the Kondopoga events.<sup>2</sup> The numbers of these 'old comers' were quite small, though. A much bigger stream of 'Caucasians' came to the area after the collapse of the USSR. A few years ago, there were only a few 'Caucasians' in Kondopoga; now there are several thousand. It is not just their numbers – they are still a minority in the predominately Slavic Russian North, the presence of indigenous people from the region notwithstanding – but it is their organization that has created problems.

Chechens and other minorities from the Northern Caucasus usually create a tightly knit community with a strong sense of solidarity. And these minorities are quite different from the majority of Russians, a difference that is sometimes noted by representatives of the minorities themselves. In an Internet discussion, a certain 'Amon,' who presented himself to the audience as born in Asia, states that Asians have preserved their traditions based on collectivism, and the problem with Russians is that they have lost their traditions.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the newcomers have a much stronger sense of ethnic/religious solidarity than the mostly socially/ethnically atomized Russians. This definitely helps the former in conducting business; and they have started to control the markets.<sup>4</sup> The locals attribute the rise in crime to these Caucasians and their general despising of Russians. According to some residents of Kondopoga, Chechens were engaged in a raping spree of Russian girls. After raping them, they were said to have put hundred

dollar banknotes in their underwear.<sup>5</sup> This was a sign of humiliation. It implies that Russian girls are prostitutes and money for sex is their only concern; therefore, upon receiving the money, the girls should not complain. Thus, for some observers – and apparently they belong to the majority – the reason for the conflict was the criminalization of the Chechen diaspora and the attempt of Chechen criminals to lord it over the peaceful and basically law-abiding Russians. For others, the reason for the tension was quite different, namely that Chechens refused to pay tribute to local Russian bandits.<sup>6–8</sup>

Moreover, they assumed that they should receive tribute from the locals. To some degree, the Chechens were able to achieve this.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the reason for the tensions, they grew in the course of time; and, in late August 2006, an ordinary brawl in Kondopoga quickly erupted into pogrom-type violence involving hundreds of Russians and ‘Caucasians.’

### **Kondopoga riot**

The brawl started on August 30, 2006, in a café, ‘Chaika.’ According to some reports, the Russians prevailed. The defeated Chechens called on other Chechens for help. The latter arrived screaming ‘Beat the Russians! We will arrange for a second Beslan!’ This was an allusion to the major terrorist attack in Beslan (2004) in which several hundred hostages, mostly children, died. The authorities intervened, and 100 people were arrested.<sup>10</sup> Several Russians were hurt; some were killed.<sup>11</sup> The victims were buried.<sup>12</sup> The militia apprehended some Chechens, but only a few.<sup>13</sup> This left the local Russians with the feeling that the authorities are on the side of the Chechens. Rumors spread among the Russians that ‘blacks’ (*chernye*) planned to engage in a ‘new Beslan.’<sup>14</sup> The local authorities soon sensed that they did not have enough law enforcement capacity to deal with riots and sent for help. A thousand members of the riot police OMON were sent to Kondopoga.<sup>15</sup> Immediately after the fight, despite the presence of OMON, there was an attempt to set shops on fire. As an indicator of the high level of tension, there was a rumor that the ‘Caucasians’ engaged in a raping spree. Soon after, two young Russians, Sergei Usin and Grigorii Slizov, were killed. Their throats were slit, which the locals regarded as a Chechen trademark. Their burial increased the tension even more; the locals tried to set shops and cafés on fire.<sup>16</sup>

The fear of pogroms alarmed the minorities from the Caucasus. They feared that Kondopoga’s unrest could spread to other regions.<sup>17</sup> According to some reports, ‘Dozens of the town’s residents, Chechens mostly, but also ethnic Azerbaijanis and Georgians, fled that night.’<sup>18</sup> Kondopoga continued to be an unstable place even after the riots were over. According to some reports, ‘‘Things are heating up in Kondopoga,’ literally: there has been another fire at a sawmill that was on fire during the recent riots (in early September). It may be an

accident, but against the backdrop of the successful anti-Georgian campaign, it doesn't look like one."<sup>19</sup> Bad feelings toward 'people of Caucasian nationality' continued to dominate the entire region even two years after the events. In Karelia, Muslims, mostly Azerbaijanis and Chechens, complained about the spread of discrimination against them.<sup>20</sup>

### **People assembly**

On 2 September 2006, there was a large assembly of some 2000 people at the '*Narodnyi Skhod*' (People Assembly).<sup>21</sup> Two thousand participants is a big number for a city with a population of 50,000.<sup>22</sup> According to some estimates, the meeting was even bigger—3000 strong, and consisted of nearly all the young men that lived in the city.<sup>23</sup> Some even believe that there were as many as 8000 people at the meeting.<sup>24</sup> Observers admit that it was not clear who organized the meeting; it seemed to be a spontaneous event. Those attending were supplied with large quantities of alcoholic beverages.<sup>25</sup> Some people saw men in Nazi uniforms and with short, military-style haircuts.<sup>26</sup>

After the meeting, at least 200 people started to rampage. The ethnicity of the owners played no role here.<sup>27</sup> Shops and cafés and local markets and automobiles were vandalized and looted or set on fire. On 3 September, the situation in Kondopoga was extremely tense. Crowds crushed and looted everything, handing over the looted goods to passers-by.<sup>28</sup> Some Russians were beaten up by militia; the crowd used Molotov cocktails and stones to respond.<sup>29</sup>

The riot police (OMON) also became quite tough. Quite a few Russian teenagers seem to have participated in the vandalizing, and all of them, including the young women, were brutally beaten up by OMON.<sup>30</sup> A hundred people were arrested. There were rumors that Chechens shot from cars, and there was increasing fear among the Chechen community. The local Chechens seem to have believed that the authorities were not able to defend them. After the pogrom, these Chechens left the city.<sup>31</sup> The feeling spread to Chechens in nearby cities and 'Caucasians' also left Petrozavodsk.

### **The role of organization**

The sense that Russians have become victims in their own state has a long history. It can be traced to the late Soviet era when many ethnic Russians believed that their economic misery was related to the government's generosity towards the representatives of the other ethnic groups of the USSR. This feeling increased with the collapse of the USSR and the rapid polarization of the Russian society, with a few tycoons – quite a few Jewish, from the ethnic point of view of course – amassing enormous fortunes. The dominant role of non-Russians in the

markets and the general increase in their numbers furnished additional reasons for resentment and increased the number of recruits for various nationalistic and openly semi-fascist groups. All of them see the present regime as representing not Russians but minorities. And these feelings have been quite widespread among the Russian populace throughout Putin's tenure. They could be recorded on the eve of Kondopoga, or soon after, when there were Internet conferences with Putin. One Russian nationalist implied that he received copies of the questions put to Putin. In all of them, Russians see themselves as the victims of Jewish oligarchs, but even more so of criminalized migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>32</sup>

The strong nationalism is also not a novelty. The first manifestation of this sort can be traced back to the beginning of Gorbachev's era. At the very end of Yeltsin's tenure, there was a march by members of Barkashov's RNE (Russian National Unity Party). In all this, one thing should not be overlooked. In the early Gorbachev era, the nationalist demonstrations, e.g. those organized by Pamiat, were allegedly not directed against the minorities but were just a manifestation of concern for the vanishing Russian cultural architectural artifacts such as monuments and churches. At the same time, Barkashov's march, with a strong anti-minority – mostly anti-semitic – implication, was condemned by the authorities as illegal. The situation started to change by Putin's time. It is true that the regime proclaimed the fight against extremism of all types as important to social/political stability; and in recent years the authorities have arrested a number of Russian nationalist extremists. Yet, the regime has apparently been unwilling to engage in a full-scale confrontation with Russian nationalists and, if it has not supported them, at the very least it has tried to ignore manifestations of Russian nationalism. In some cases the regime has even given an approving nod to some of the organizational manifestations of nationalism, even those that openly see Russians as being oppressed by the minorities and by the regime that supported these minorities. In 2004, the nationalists staged a legal meeting for the first time.<sup>33</sup>

Next to the occasional nod of approval from the authorities, the Russian nationalists also benefited from a growing sense of ethnic solidarity among ethnic Russians and their increasing ability to organize themselves. All of this was the product of capitalist modernity, in which Russia had finally entered, and which led not just to the collapse of the old *Gemeinschaft* arrangements – in Tönnies' definition – and the atomization of society (one could see this process easily in the late Gorbachev/early Yeltsin era) – but to the emerging of a new *Gesellschaft* culture. This culture would emphasize not asociality/atomization but socialization. The discontent would not just lead to a-social violence and looting, but also to organizational protest with the political parties connected with the grassroots movement. This is precisely what happened in Kondopoga. It signals not just increasing ethnic/social tension, but also a new level of socialization, so to speak,

of Russian society and gives proof of a new step in the modernization of Russian society. In a way, the situation is similar to what Russia witnessed at the turn of the 20th century. At that time, the rise of crime and the first major pogrom waves against Jews coincided with the first organized strikes and with political parties trying to take advantage of the popular discontent. All of this would lead to the 1905–1907 revolution that itself would be a combination of both asocial outbursts and social-political conflict, as it is usually understood in the context of capitalist modernity. From this perspective, one can look at the Kondopoga event.

The Kondopoga event was different from other ethnic clashes because it was the first time that political forces tried to use ethnic conflicts for their political goals.<sup>34</sup> DPNI (the Movement Against Illegal Emigration) had played the major role in leading the discontent. This organization had emerged in the early 2000s, with Vladimir Belov (Potkin) as its leader. It has a certain similarity with the previous nationalistic organizations active in the Yeltsin era. On the one hand DPNI follows the model of Barkashov's RNE. Barkashov tried to present his party as the party of law and order and even cooperated with law enforcement agencies. Still, Barkashov proclaimed that the regime is absolutely rotten and in the hands of Jews and Westerners, mostly Americans of course. At variance with Barkashov, Belov not only emphasized his party's deep attachment to the law but also approved of some of the present regime's actions. He continued to maintain a relationship with people such as Dmitry Rogozin, the mainstream Russian nationalist who was recently appointed to be Russia's representative in NATO. Before departing, Rogozin advised Belov and his supporters not to engage in any unlawful activities, but to try to infiltrate the government and make it work in the interests of the Russian people. Secondly, DPNI avoided anti-Semitic or even anti-Western rhetoric, at least in the party's major publications. Moreover, DPNI ideologists constantly emphasized that with all of Russia's problems with the West, Russians see white Europeans and white Americans as their racial brothers who experience the same problems as the Russians, e.g. the pressure of the minorities. The focus of DPNI's attacks is not Jews and Westerners, as with Barkashov and, in fact, with the majority of 'Red to Brown' opposition in the Yeltsin era – but ethnic minorities from the Caucasus and Central Asia, regardless of whether they are Russian Federation citizens or not. DPNI, then, tried to be integrated in the government or, at least, to have influential friends inside the regime. Belov in fact tried to emerge as the representative of the 'patriotic' flank of the regime, the role that before had been aspired to by Alexander Dugin's 'Eurasianists' who emphasize the essential unity between Orthodox Russians and Muslims of various backgrounds. Thus, Belov's DPNI plays an ambivalent role in its relation with the authorities.

On the other hand, DPNI tries to present itself as the only organization that is really concerned with the interests of ethnic Russians, those that constitute the

majority of the poor. Still, DPNI ideologists believe that the support of ethnic Russians is what will make them indispensable to the regime and will finally lead, if not DPNI, then at least Belov to officialdom. In fact, Belov could well look at Niiazov (Medvedev) – the ethnic Russian who converted to Islam and imposed himself, mostly as representative of the Russian Muslims, as a role model. Indeed, Niiazov was a Duma deputy. All of these considerations – the demonstration of its importance to the authorities and its dedication to the interests of the Russian masses – are what pushed DPNI to take an active role in the Kondopoga event. Indeed, as even enemies of DPNI acknowledge, DPNI demonstrated great organization in responding to the Kondopoga rioting;<sup>35</sup> and a branch of DPNI has since emerged in Kondopoga.<sup>36</sup>

The engagement of DPNI was not the only sign of a maturing of Russia's political culture. One of the event's essential aspects – besides the violence and looting – was the grassroots organization's attempt to create power from below. This was marked not just by the meeting, already noted, but also by an attempt to create a parallel power structure. The desire to create a parallel power base seems to have emerged in the early stage of the revolt. The residents of Kondopoga demanded the eviction of all 'illegal émigrés' from the city. They also demanded the creation of a 'people detachment' (Narodnaia Druzhina) and NGO Committee on Migration.<sup>37</sup> It seems that the locals succeeded, at least for a while, to create a detachment (*druzhina*) to maintain order, a detachment that, according to some, was 80 strong.<sup>38</sup> Other sources said the detachment included 50 people.<sup>39</sup> According to some reports, the numbers of those who were enlisted into detachments were several hundred. 'According to some reports, 100 policemen and 200 people's militia men are controlling order in Kondopoga.'<sup>40</sup>

### **The role of organization and the event's aftermath**

The masses, and most likely DPNI, continued to be organized and politically engaged even when the events were over in early October 2006. Kondopoga residents called for a boycott of elections in Karelia<sup>41</sup> and continued to stand behind those Russians that had been arrested by the authorities. In the beginning of November 2007 there was a collection of signatures under a petition in Kondopoga. Those who launched the process demanded that the authorities end the repression against those Russians that had engaged in nationalist riots in various Russian states such as Sal'sk (Rostov region), Khargun (Irkutsk region), Vol'sk (Saratov region) and Kondopoga.<sup>42</sup> After Kondopoga, the DPNI continued to monitor the aftermath of events. For example, the Briansk branch of DPNI called a meeting on September 29, 2006.<sup>43</sup>

DPNI and similar organizations, then, took advantage of the rise of Russian nationalism and the Russian Populace's feeling that government is not on the side

of ethnic Russians, but the nationalist parties/groups were not the only ones to do so. Political observers, mostly in opposition to the present regime, assumed that Russian nationalism could well be used by the local elite who dreamed of separating themselves from Moscow and who could also rely on the help of the West.<sup>44</sup>

The importance of Kondopoga is underscored by the fact that Kondopoga was not an isolated event. It was part of a cluster of ethnic-related violence that either preceded or followed it.

### **Kondopoga not an isolated event**

Ethnic violence between Russians and various ethnic minorities took place before Kondopoga, albeit not on such a scale. Still, ethnic tension and the rise of ethnicity-related violence became evident with the beginning of the Putin era. In October 2001, there were fights in several Moscow markets, resulting in two persons killed and 23 wounded. One of these markets, near the metro 'Tsaritsino,' was invaded by 300-men strong groups, bearing the emblem of Russian National Unity (RNE). Later, they beat up some of the metro's passengers. The metro militia was able to arrest 20 of those that had been responsible for the riot. This sort of ethnic violence had increased by the end of Putin's tenure.

Throughout 2005/2006, several other serious ethnic attacks of violence and other manifestations of ethnic tension occurred in different places in Russia. One of them took place in the winter of 2006. In February, there was an attempt on the life of Ataman Khanin. This led to violence against 'Caucasians' in the city of Novoaleksandrovsk (15–16 February 2006).<sup>45</sup>

In 2005, Terek Cossacks had elected Andrei Khanin as their leader. Since that time, the Cossacks had become actively engaged in the political/social life of the region. Cossacks had cooperated with the militia to apprehend illegal migrants and drug dealers. This led to Khanin's conflict with the representatives from the Caucasus. In February 2006 there was an attempt on Khanin's life, and local Cossacks accused the local Georgians of committing the crime. The house of the director, an ethnic Georgian, of a local meat-processing factory was attacked with Molotov cocktails. Fearful for his life, he and his family left the city; it seems that later other 'Caucasians' also left. Some politicians in the Duma saw a direct similarity between the events in Novoaleksandrovsk and those in Kondopoga. The events also received the attention of DPNI.

Similar events also took place in the south of European Russia. In Remontenskii district (raion) of the Rostov region, a 28-year-old Chechen raped the daughter of a local Cossack ataman. More than a hundred Cossacks moved to the village of Remontnoe to deal with the situation. The militia, however, was able to prevent violence.<sup>46</sup> However, law enforcement was not always successful. This



seems to have been the case in Sal'sk (Rostov region). A brawl took place on June 25, 2006, near the restaurant 'Razguliai.' The conflict ran between Dagestanians and Russians. In August 2006, there was a fight in Saratov between Russians and 'Caucasians;' and there was a conflict near the Metro station Dobryninskaia in Moscow, with approximately 150 people involved.<sup>47</sup>

There was also ethnic violence in Kharagun (Chita region) and Syktykvar (Komi Republic) and possibly Novorossiisk. It is not only ethnic Russians who engaged in fighting with people from the Caucasus. In the Astrakhan region, Chechens killed a Kalmyk, Nikolai Boldyrev. As a result, 300 Kalmyk started to rampage all over the village, destroying cars and houses that belonged to Chechens.<sup>48</sup> There was a fight in the Vol'sk (Saratov province) between Russians and Armenians.<sup>49</sup> There was also ethnic violence in other cities in the Volga region. In September 2006, there was a big fight in Samara between Russians and 'Caucasians,' in which 20 people were involved. One person was killed and two hospitalized.<sup>50</sup> Inter-ethnic fighting was also recorded in the biggest Russian cities, which were under the special control of the authorities. In September 2006, there was a big brawl in St. Petersburg; the militia arrested more than 20 people.<sup>51</sup>

Kondopoga-type violence persisted throughout 2007, despite the authorities' attempts to reduce the tensions. The authorities, for example, assumed that criminals released from prison and the unemployed might ignite the violence. Consequently, in 2008, local authorities in Karelia tried to find jobs for ex-prison inmates.<sup>52</sup> Still, the violence continued and was duly interwoven with the spread of racist feelings and fears in society. Indeed, in 2007, as years before: 'Shortly before April 20 (the anniversary of Hitler's birthday) at least three cities in Russia – Belgorod, Ryazan and Izhevsk – were struck by panic amidst rumors of forthcoming skinhead invasions, massive fights and riots. (The new-Nazis themselves were spreading such rumors.)'<sup>53</sup> Ethnic minorities had seen in the Kondopoga event what might happen with them. They could well be victims of the pogrom, and the authorities would be either unable or unwilling to protect them. For the Russian nationalists, Kondopoga was a model to follow. Indeed, in 2007, quite a few conflicts 'assumed an ethnic-nationalist dimension largely due to involvement of right-wing radical groups eager to replicate the Kondopoga model'.<sup>54</sup> The most spectacular type of violence took place in the South, when '300 to 400 people engaged in a fight in Stavropol'.<sup>55</sup> Moscow, the Russian capital, was apparently under the most vigilant control of the authorities. Still, in June 2007 there was a fight in Moscow between Russians and people from Asia. Around 50 people were involved.<sup>56</sup> Another report provided a more detailed description of the event: on June 22, there was a large fight between Russians on the one hand and some 50 Dagestians and Chechens on the other, in Moscow, near the monument to the Heroes of Plevna.<sup>57</sup> The next month, there was a fight between Chechens and Russians in Moscow.<sup>58</sup> Ethnic clashes also took place

near Moscow. On July 12, 2007, there was fighting between Russians and Armenians in Krasnoarmeisk, a small city near Moscow.<sup>59</sup> In August, there was a new fight in Moscow between Russians and Asians.<sup>60</sup> The fighting continued in 2008. Ethnic minorities from “near abroad” were also engaged in the fight in the Russian capital. In May, for example, there was a fight in Moscow; 20 people were involved.<sup>61</sup> In May 2007, there was a fight between Armenians and Azerbaijanians in Moscow, involving some 100 people.<sup>62</sup>

In the winter of 2008, around 40 Azerbaijanians and Dagestanians engaged in a fight in Moscow. All sides used firearms.<sup>63</sup> Near St. Petersburg, the second city of Russia, clashes between Russians and Ingushians took place.<sup>64</sup> Fights between Russians and Asian minorities also took place. For example, in the town of Kontolova, Leningrad Province, a fight took place between Russians and Tadjiks. Around 200–300 people were involved. Sticks and pieces of metal were used as weapons.<sup>65</sup> There were also other conflicts with ‘Caucasians’ outside of the Russian heartland.<sup>66</sup> Serious conflicts occurred in the winter of 2007 between Terek Cossacks and local Georgians. And in the Russian Far East, there was a fight between Russians and Chinese in Habarovsk.<sup>67</sup> Serious ethnic conflicts also took place in the summer of 2007 even between Russians and Armenians who historically were friendly to each other. In Venev (16,000 residents) in the Tula Region, disturbances between Russians and members of the local Armenian community took place on July 22, 2007.<sup>68</sup> The conflict led to meetings of local Russian residents. One of their major demands was the expulsion from the city of all of those who had no residence permit.<sup>69</sup>

In some cases, it was the Russians who had initiated the violence. In other cases, one could not identify for sure who had initiated it. In yet other cases the minorities clearly initiated the attacks. For example: there was a massive attack against ethnic Russians in the villages of Kytsygirovka, Irkutsk Province, by visitors from neighboring communities, apparently ethnic Buryats, in August. ‘At least 26 people were injured as a result of the hour-long attack.’<sup>70</sup>

The minorities also continued to fight each other. In some cases, the authorities were able to prevent the conflict. For example, in Ufa, around 150 Bashkirs were ready to fight Chechens. The local OMON prevented the fighting.<sup>71</sup> Still, in most other cases the authorities were unable to prevent the violence. For example: at a railroad station in Artezian in Kalmykia, groups of passengers from Azerbaijan were attacked by 50–60 people. Around 25 Azerbaijanians were hurt.<sup>72</sup> There were other mass fighting between various ethnic groups from the Caucasus.<sup>73</sup>

### **The attempt at self-organization**

Besides the sheer number of people involved in the fighting and the span of violence, Kondopoga and similar events have other important implications for

the development of the political culture of the Russian nationalist extremists. While Kondopoga had many more people involved in the fighting than in previous conflicts, it had other important specificities that were not seen in the previous conflicts. Kondopoga was marked not just by violence but also by an attempt to create a parallel power structure – mostly through ‘*skhod*’ – the assembly of residents on the major town square. Similar events could be seen in other cities. Following the Kondopoga events, the residents of Petrazavodsk and Olonets planned a meeting. In Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia, ‘notices were distributed calling upon people to gather for a public meeting and demand the expulsion of the Caucasians.’<sup>74</sup> The officials were determined to prohibit this. One of the nationalist-minded commentators, who most likely expressed the views of the residents of these two cities, stated that the government could try to disperse the meeting. This would have been a crucial mistake for it would demonstrate to the Russian masses that they could only solve their problems through violence.<sup>75</sup> And, indeed, the officials decided not to intervene; and the meeting took place in Petrozavodsk, with around 300 people in attendance.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the ill feelings of the local authorities, the meeting in Tol’iati also seems to have taken place. Later, similar meetings were recorded in several other Russian cities, including Sal’sk, Syktykvar and even, if one would believe the source, Moscow.<sup>77</sup> In some places, the local Russians were quite direct in their demands. For example, in Sal’sk, the populace, as in Kondopoga, tried to create an institution of self-government parallel to the one that already existed. The Russian residents also demanded public control over the investigation of cases of ethnic violence.<sup>78</sup>

Kondopoga also provided a powerful symbol of the resistance of those involved in nationalistic demonstrations, and, in St. Petersburg, Russian participants marched, screaming ‘Kondopoga!’<sup>79</sup> The influence of Kondopoga, or, at least, similar Kondopoga types of events, continued to be recorded at the beginning of Dmitry Medvedev’s presidency. And, as in the case with Kondopoga, the tension had been accumulating for a long time. In Rzhev for example, as mentioned earlier, Armenians had emerged as a visible ethnic group since the late 1980s.

While, in the beginning, the relationship between Russians and Armenians was relatively harmonious, the situation deteriorated as time progressed and the number of Armenians increased. They became engaged in various crimes, including rape. As a result of accumulated tension, on April 5 and 6, 2008, ethnic riots took place between some 50 to 60 Armenians and some 20 local Russians. It seems that firearms were used. One Armenian was killed, and several people were wounded on both sides.<sup>80</sup> Some local residents claimed that submachine guns were used, and that up to 11 people were killed.<sup>81</sup> Some participants/witnesses of the events complained that the authorities were on the side of the Armenians.<sup>82</sup> Of course, the authorities claimed that the conflict had no ethnic implications.<sup>83</sup>

While the reasons for Kondopoga-type violence were many, and involved not so much the ethnic but rather the social ills of post-Soviet Russia, the populace has seen the source of all its problems in the minorities, and particularly the Chechens. They desire to see the Russian heartland, as either minorities-free, especially of Chechens, or with a minimal number of minorities, as a way to the good life. Consequently, they demand that the authorities liberate Russia from what they consider the source of all their problems.

### **Chechens should be purged from Russia**

The idea that Russia should be purged of Chechens, in fact of all other people from the Caucasus regardless of their citizenship, as well as others whom Russians regard as non-Europeans, has gained considerable ground among the Russian public. Kondopoga provided many of those who either were engaged in the events or watched the events from outside the opportunity to express their ill feeling about the people from the Caucasus and similar folk, and to demand their deportation. Driving Chechens – in fact, all people from the Caucasus – from the city or even from the entire country, is a central, if not *the* central, demand of the populace. According to a report of witnesses of the event, the only slogan popular in Kondopoga is ‘Russia for Russians!’<sup>84</sup> It is clear that in their minds the Chechens and other minorities are the source of all trouble, and a Chechen-free society is seen as almost ideal. Many Russians who watched the events from other parts of the country share the same feeling. The Kondopoga city site received many e-mails in support of driving Chechens and other minority people from Russia<sup>85</sup> and imposing restrictions on ‘illegal immigrants.’ Residents from other parts of Karelia and other parts of the Russian North expressed their solidarity with the Russians in Kondopoga. They are not alone. A contributor to the Internet discussion from Krasnodar praised the residents of Kondopoga as sort of heroes. Another contributor, from Moscow province, stated that Kondopoga is supported all over Russia and that people have demanded the deportation of immigrants who came to Russia after 1991.<sup>86</sup> Another discussant opined that the minorities should be restrained in their movement<sup>87</sup> and their property rights should be restricted. One contributor to the discussions, for example said that it is only Russians who should be proprietors/managers of bars and cafes. For some contributors to the discussion, the purge of the minorities should go along with general changes in how public order is maintained. The residents of Petrozavodsk and Olonets demanded that illegal immigrants be deported and at the same time a ‘People Detachment’ (*Narodnaia Druzhdina*) should be created from those who serve in Chechnya. A ‘People Commission’ should be created to prevent corruption.<sup>88</sup> It is not just the radicals and marginal youth, then, that see the minorities as the major problem. These views seem to be shared even by

those who could be regarded as mainstream and who read such mainstream publications as *Gazeta ru* and engage in discussions centered on the newspaper's Internet site. Following Kondopoga, a certain 'Aleksandr' stated with an air of bitterness that only in Russia could minorities mistreat Russians. It would be impossible for Russians as a minority to do the same in the Caucasus; it is the minorities who bought Russia's bureaucracy.<sup>89</sup> It is not just anonymous participants in the Internet discussions who proclaim that the Russian state should be firmly on the side of ethnic Russians; the same views are held by easily identifiable contributors to the major national publications. One of them, a contributor to *Izvestiia*, stated that Russian officials should forget about political correctness and understand that the influx of immigrants creates serious ethnic tensions.<sup>90</sup>

In the minds of those that participated in the ethnic riots, the presence of the minorities, especially those from the Caucasus, had been blended with other ills of post-Soviet Russia. And this was well understood by some nationalistic groups, such as DPNI, which reproduced the resolutions of Russian popular assemblies (*skhody*) not only in Kondopoga but also in other Russian cities.

'These informal groups called for a variety of steps, ranging from organizing armed militia of veterans of the Chechen war to defend Russians against immigrants, to the expulsion of non-Russians from their regions, to the judicial punishment of any officials who were in any way involved in allowing illegal immigration to occur.'<sup>91</sup>

Regardless of whether the purging of minorities is seen as the only goal or a package with other projects, it is regarded as extremely important for Russians' very existence. Contributors to various Internet discussions pointed out that if Russians could not stop immigration they would disappear as an ethnos, as had already happened with many other great people.<sup>92</sup>

It is clear that most Russians in Kondopoga and, implicitly, all over Russia, have negative feelings toward minorities, especially 'Caucasians.' But the picture is not always black and white. Some of those who participated in the Kondopoga riots differentiate between 'Caucasians.' While Chechens are seen as the universal evil, the story is rather different in the case of, for example, Armenians who are seen by some contributors to the Internet discussions as rather harmless or even positive. Some locals also seem to be willing to make exceptions for some Chechens, for instance, for those that had come to Karelia a long time ago, during the Soviet period, and who had spent most of their life in Karelia and, it was implied, married local women. Some contributors to the discussions even pity these 'good' Chechens who are unjustly blamed for the misdeeds of the vicious criminalized newcomers.

This setting apart of the 'old comers,' integrated in the community, from the vicious majority of their ethnic brethren, is a familiar pattern in dealing with

other minorities. For example, even in places where anti-Semitic feeling runs strong the predominant ethnic group might regard ‘their’ Jews, those who have lived in the community for a long time, as different from the rest of the Jews. While the rest of the Jews are seen as evil, the local Jews are seen as different. Moreover, even if all Jews – both local and non-local – are seen as evil, some particular Jews from the locality could be seen as positive exceptions. The same model could be seen in the case of the majority transformed into the minorities, as was the case with ethnic Russians in some of the republics of the former USSR. Here, the Russians from the majority had emerged as a minority. For some of the now dominant ethnic groups, all Russians, either those from Russia proper or local Russians, are equally bad. Still, for some of them, these local Russians, especially if they know the local language and live according to local traditions, are ‘their’ good Russians who are set apart from the rest. In this case, some ethnic Russians, in the position of ‘good’ minorities, could join the dominant ethnic groups in their drive against the ‘bad’ minorities. This also seems to be the case with Kondopoga when the local indigenous population – Karelians – was on the side of the Russians in dealing with the Chechens.<sup>93</sup> The fear and hate of Chechens and the vision of the government as representing minorities, not ethnic Russians, was reinforced by the statement of Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechen viceroy, of a sort, of Chechnya, that he would protect his kin if the authorities would not be able to stop the violence against Chechens.

### **Kadyrov as Chechen protector**

Upon receiving the news about a pogrom in Kondopoga and the apparent inability of the authorities to maintain order, on September 4, Kadyrov stated that he would engage in conflict if the authorities would not stop the violence against the Chechens.<sup>94</sup> Kadyrov promised to protect Chechens in Kondopoga.<sup>95</sup> He made a public statement that if the authorities were powerless, he would take the matter into his own hands and send a Chechen detachment to protect Chechen civilians. There were rumors in Karelia that a train of Chechens had moved to Petrazavodsk to blow up the city.<sup>96</sup> The various political players also took Kadyrov’s statement quite seriously. Leonid Ivashov, the chairman of the Union of Russian People (*Soiuz russkogo naroda*) the right wing nationalistic organization, proclaimed that the present regime is actually supported by criminal groups composed of ethnic minorities. According to Ivashov, Kadyrov and his henchmen are important, actually the only reliable military force of the regime that could be used against the Russian people.<sup>97</sup> A week after Kondopoga, he reaffirmed his previous statement in regard to Kadyrov. Ivashov proclaimed that Kadyrov could assemble considerable forces with the full knowledge of the Moscow elite, who regarded the Kadyrov army as the only reliable force that

could be used against an uprising of the Russian masses.<sup>98</sup> The assumption that Kadyrov's Chechens could be bloody janissaries of a sort who could well quell the discontent of rebellious Russian masses was shared by other nationalist observers. One of them insisted that the Chechens could be sent by the authorities as shock troops to a variety of Russian cities, including Moscow.<sup>99</sup>

While Ivashov and similar-thinking folk implied that the authorities could, indeed, be successful in employing Kadyrov's troops, others held a different opinion. For them, the use of Chechens by the authorities would just drive the masses to direct confrontation with the regime. It would be not just a segment of the Russian population but the Russian masses in toto that would confront the Chechen troops; and in this case the regime could hardly survive. Responding to Kadyrov's statement, Belov (Potkin), the leader of DPNI praised Kadyrov in a sort of sly way. He stated that he liked Kadyrov because he says what he really thinks.<sup>100</sup> He also warned Kadyrov about actually doing anything. Belov stated that if the Chechen OMON would, indeed, drive to Karelia, the entire Russian population would stand against it.<sup>101</sup> The rank and file of DPNI shared Belov's view and was outraged. One of the members of DPNI wrote that he was disgusted by the fact that Kadyrov's henchmen would be sent to suppress a possible uprising of the Russian masses. In fact, these Kadyrov henchmen are the same as those whom Russia fought.<sup>102</sup> Not only the still marginal Belov and Ivashov and their crew voiced their indignation. Even moderate, mainstream Russian intellectuals were indignant. Maksim Sokolov, the well-known Russian columnist from the mainstream *Izvestia*, proclaimed that Kadyrov's statement indicated that not only did Putin not control Chechnya, but that the Chechens could do whatever they wanted in Russia proper.<sup>103</sup>

A contributor to the semi-official/official RIA Novosti followed suit in expressing his surprise and indignation. He stated that 'Ramzan Kadyrov had made serious statements. The bad situation is made much worse by the fact that Chechnya has only recently got out of a civil war – it abounds in weapons and hotheads that are ready to rush to Kondopoga and "put things right there".'<sup>104</sup> Even those political players such as Dmitry Taratorin, a member of the Eurasian International Movement, whose leader, Aleksandr Dugin, is absolutely loyal to Putin, stated with an air of perplexity and anger that there is a rumor that Kadyrov's Chechens are the only real support of Putin.<sup>105</sup> The feeling that it was Kadyrov and the Chechens and similar minorities who ran the country percolated in the mind of the average Kondopoga resident, even when the riot was over and no Kadyrov detachment emerged. Local Russians continue to believe that the authorities have sold them to the Chechens, and that it was the Chechens who controlled the local militia.<sup>106</sup>

Those who either directly participated in the Kondopoga event or closely monitored it were especially outraged by Kadyrov's statement and what they see

as Putin's powerlessness. One of the participants in the discussion occurring on the Kondopoga city website stated with an air of bitter irony that Kadyrov is Putin's best friend. He implied that Putin is actually relying on the support of terrorists. And he mocked Putin's early statement that he would 'bump off the terrorists even in the toilets.'<sup>107</sup>

### **Response to Kondopoga**

The authorities' response to the event was manifold. On the one hand, it increased pressure on what the authorities have regarded as the representatives of Russian extremist nationalism. On the other hand, the authorities tried to demonstrate to the Russian populace that they take its interests to heart. The drive against what the authorities regarded as the manifestation of Russian extremist nationalism was seen by the authorities as the best way to prevent the repetition of Kondopoga-type events in the future. Literally days after the riot, the authorities proposed to increase the punishment for those engaged in inciting national hatred.<sup>108</sup> The authorities also became especially apprehensive when a contributor to *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, the liberal vehicle with a yellowish slant, stated that Belov, the leader of DPNI, warned the authorities that a new edition of Kondopoga could well erupt in Moscow. This is an empty threat, the newspaper stated, for the authorities' drive against extremists makes the latter's activities pretty much impossible. As a matter of fact, the authorities might well prohibit DPNI in the future.<sup>109</sup> These remarks were not groundless. A criminal investigation was started against Belov<sup>110</sup> and continued to the beginning of 2007. He was accused of fomenting ethnic animosities.<sup>111</sup>

Not only in Moscow, where DPNI had its headquarters of a sort, but in other parts of Russia too, the authorities were apprehensive. In Murmansk, a seaport in the north, officials apparently made some preparations, and Murmansk officials stated that they would not allow a repetition of Kondopoga.<sup>112</sup> While engaged in a drive against those who might provide leadership for the crowd, the authorities also tried to punish those who were directly engaged in the violence. They were also repressed by the authorities; and during or immediately after the event 129 people were arrested.<sup>113</sup> The investigation and trial continued from the fall of 2006 to at least the summer of 2007 and beyond.<sup>114</sup>

While repression against Russian extremists was one response to the problem, it was not the authorities' only one. They also sent a signal to the Russian populace that it understood the latter's concern. These signals, of course, were not specific. The authorities avoided any discussion about the direct connection between violence and the conditions created by the post-Soviet regime – the increased social and regional polarization – the point of the various opposition groups. Neither did the authorities blame foreign involvement, despite the fact



that foreign involvement was considered to be fomenting disorder in the country. There was, for example, continuous blame of the West, especially the US, of attempting to stage in Russia a new 'orange revolution,' i.e. a revolution similar to that which erupted in neighboring Ukraine, and that brought a pro-Western government to power. The message was different: the government sees the problem of increasing numbers of ethnic minorities, especially migrants, and will try to rectify the problem. One other implication of the message is that the government is, indeed, the representative of the majority; and, since ethnic Russians represent the majority, the authorities are firmly on their side. This message was sent to the public soon after the Kondopoga events. Putin for example, stated that he was concerned with the Kondopoga events, which indicated, in his view, problems in Russian society.<sup>115</sup>

A few weeks after the riot, Putin fired several officials in Karelia. He also acknowledged that the markets are dominated by migrants, and promised changes.<sup>116</sup> A new law limits the number of migrants that can trade on the markets. Since most migrants are not Slavs, the law apparently provides more opportunities for ethnic Russians to engage in trade. The law also caters to another myth in the minds of ethnic Russians: the assumption that a high price on the market is related to the ethnicity of the sellers. It is assumed that sales people of ethnic minorities have created a mafia-type monopoly that drives up prices. With the departure of a good number of minorities from the market, the prices would fall, the assumption went. With a strong anti-minority feeling, government actions were hailed by many ethnic Russian and nationalist individuals, groups and parties. DPNI immediately expressed its support. DPNI had supported Putin's attempt to clear the Russian market – actually, Russia in general – from illegal emigration and posted a proclamation. Still, the author/authors of the quoted proclamation stated that they are not sure that corrupted officials would support the president's decree.<sup>117</sup>

The response of the Russian populace to the government action was controversial. Some hardly believed that this action would make much of a difference in overall regime policy. Such views were, for example, shared by 'Russkii Paren', (Russian Boy) who placed his comments on the Kondopoga city Internet site. 'Russkii Paren' stated that the authorities are bought by the Chechens. And, as he implied, the regime's rhetoric and recent decree did not mean much: the regime continued to be basically anti-Russian. However, the fact that the authorities started to speak about Chechen abuse indicates that the authorities understand that the situation is very serious.<sup>118</sup> 'Russkii Paren implied that the authorities' fear indicates that the regime is not as formidable as it looks, and the Russian masses should push the regime harder, until it fails. Still not all share these feelings. According to some reports, Putin's move against migrants made him quite popular.<sup>119</sup> Similar government actions, such as the deportation of hundreds of ethnic Georgians, further increased the regime's popularity.<sup>120</sup>

### Assessment of Kondopoga

The authorities, the various political forces and, of course, the general public, have all watched Kondopoga and its aftermath with great attention. Each player has provided his or her own interpretation of events and the reason why the event took place.

The authorities claim that Russian nationalists deliberately incited events in Kondopoga, especially those that belong to DPNI.<sup>121</sup> This was clearly the view of the local Karelian authorities. Karelia's deputy prosecutor, Pyotr Klemeshev, believed that the riots in Kondopoga were instigated by people in Moscow and St. Petersburg. 'Karelia was used as a proving ground to test a mechanism for triggering unrest in any other region of Russia,' he said.<sup>122</sup> Some members of the ruling circles believed that Kondopoga was instigated not just by internal enemies, e.g. Russian nationalists – but also by foreign powers. According to the views of some Russian experts close to the Duma, the USA is bound to promote the disintegration of Russia. Karelia is one of the places that should be separate from Russia.<sup>123</sup>

While the authorities saw in the Kondopoga riots mostly the handiwork of nationalists, the 'Red to Brown,' the nationalistic-minded communists centered on the newspaper *Zavtra*, saw in Kondopoga the manifestation of deep-seated problems in post-Soviet society. Genadii Ziuganov, the Communist leader, related Kondopoga to the high level of unemployment among youth in the Northern Caucasus.<sup>124</sup> Aleksei Stepanov, a contributor to *Zavtra*, stated that the events in Kondopoga were caused by a deep economic crisis of the region. During the post-Soviet period, people lived in absolute misery. Quite a few people survived only on what they hunted, fished or gathered in the forest.<sup>125</sup> Denis Tukmakov, a contributor to *Zavtra*, stated that events in Kondopoga were caused not just by ethnic tension but also by the much deeper problems of the post-Soviet society: the rise of the *nouveaux riches*, corruption, and the misery of the majority. And he said the authorities have only two options: either to fix these problems themselves, or to face a brutal, spontaneous revolt.<sup>126</sup> Viktor Alksnis, one of the best-known Red opponents of the regime, pointed out that the authorities should draw the opposite conclusions from the events in Kondopoga and start to support Russians.<sup>127</sup> The members of the 'International Eurasian Movement,' with Aleksandr Dugin as their leader, assumed that, internal reasons notwithstanding, it was the enemy from abroad who instigated the revolt. In Dugin's view, the authorities do not have a clear strategy for solving ethnic problems. Further, an external force tried to use ethnic conflicts to destabilize the country.<sup>128</sup> Dmitry Taratorin, a fellow Eurasianist, supported Dugin's stating that the events in Kondopoga were arranged by Boris Berezovsky, exiled 'oligarch,' and similar personalities who wanted to stage a coup and take power.<sup>129</sup> Valerii Korovin, a leader of the Eurasian Youth Union (ESM), and another Dugin lieutenant, implied

that events in Kondopoga should be taken seriously by the authorities for the reason that the conniving Berezovsky and, of course, the US, were behind the events. For him, the authorities were and are afraid not so much of an 'orange revolution' but of a nationalistic, neo-fascist revolution orchestrated by forces from abroad, including the runaway oligarchs. This fear of the authorities is not baseless.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, Korovin pointed out that the idea that the minorities from the Caucasus should be beaten up is very popular today in Russia and could well lead to ugly revolts, not with an 'orange' (e.g. Western liberal) hue but with a brownish, neo-fascist tint. While he implied that the authorities should be concerned with events such as occurred in Kondopoga, and the frame of mind that led to them, he discarded the notion that the authorities deliberately incite Russian nationalism as a way of increasing their popularity. Indeed, the authorities understand that it is quite dangerous to play the nationalist card, for the violence could easily get out of control.<sup>131</sup> He implied that it is mostly forces outside Russia who try to do this. They – the US first of all – have tried to use Russian nationalism to destroy the natural Eurasian symbiosis between Russians and other ethnic groups that live in Russia and to foment revolution, as has already happened in other republics of the former USSR, and by so doing plunge Russia into anarchy and disintegration.

'Eurasianists' are not alone in seeing outside forces as playing the main role in the events. This is also the view of the authorities in Karelia, whose views are, nevertheless, complicated. On the one hand, some of the officials see migrants as a source of the problems. One Russian official in Kondopoga stated that it was the Chechens who should be blamed for the violence, as they misbehaved.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, some of the local authorities believe that foreign powers indeed played a role in destabilizing the situation in Karelia.<sup>133</sup> Some of those who either participated in Kondopoga or watched the events closely also believe in foreign hands. This was the view of 'My,' who stated that ethnic violence is created by the US, which wishes to see Russia disintegrate. Only in this case could the US dominate the globe completely.<sup>134</sup>

Russian nationalists praised the participants in the Kondopoga events as Russians who had finally stood up for their rights. M. Deliagin, a well-known Russian pundit, proclaimed that the events in Kondopoga demonstrated that the government does not defend Russian people.<sup>135</sup> The Russian populace had been patient for a long time, but now, Deliagin implied, the Russians had finally started to defend their rights. Igor Artemov, a well-known Russian nationalist, praised the heroes of Kharagun and Kondopoga.<sup>136</sup> Other nationalist-minded journalists proclaimed that a revolution of sorts actually took place in Kondopoga, where power was assumed by 17-to-18-year old youths.<sup>137</sup> Some Russian nationalists were really excited. One of them lauded Kondopoga as a landmark in Russian history, saying it could be compared with 9 January 1905, when the people's trust in the tsar was destroyed.<sup>138</sup> For others, Kondopoga was a new Stalingrad, a watershed

in modern Russian history.<sup>139</sup> A commentator using the internet pen name ‘Driver’ believes that the experience of Kondopoga may be useful in the future, and that DPNI might be the nucleus of all the Russian movements for liberation. In his view, the uprising in Kondopoga is the most important event of the last 10 to 15 years, definitely to be noted in the history books.<sup>140</sup>

While most observers believe that nationalistic riots are inspired by the forces of the opposition, other observers have a different opinion. According to some reports, most of the publications of the Russian press supported Russian nationalists in Kondopoga and other cities. According to some pundits, this indicates that at least some people in government play the nationalist card.<sup>141</sup>

Liberal views on the events were ambiguous. On the one hand, some went along with the Eurasianists, believing that the source of the problem should be found outside the country. Others, however, saw the roots of the problem inside Russia. The idea was that Kondopoga was part of the global American design to dismember Russia from within. According to some Russian experts, ‘The United States will promote a return to Boris Yeltsin’s concept of federalization, and encourage separatist trends in a number of Russian regions – including the Caucasus, the Trans-Volga area, Karelia, the Komi Republic, Murmansk, and the Nenets autonomous district.’<sup>142</sup> Still, the majority of liberal intellectuals looked for the roots of Kondopoga in the internal problems of the country. According to one of them, a survey indicated that events in Kondopoga ‘actually showed Russian society to be in a pre-pogrom condition, in terms of its collective mentality.’<sup>143</sup> One of the essential reasons for these conditions is ‘rapid social stratification and social envy as an after-effect. This latter is particularly strong in the provinces and in the chronically depressed zones where most of the population barely manage to make ends meet.’ This would involve some from 41%–46% of the Russians, according to the survey. Other Russian liberal pundits also saw in Kondopoga a sign of the most serious social ills. One of them stated ‘Clashes like the one in Kondopoga were happening five years ago, and ten years ago as well. But they didn’t have consequences like what we’re seeing now. This indicates that a new climate has been created in Russia, a climate that provokes such outbursts of violence.’<sup>144</sup> Kondopoga was the result of post-Soviet development, which upset many Russians.<sup>145</sup> And pundits warn that Kondopoga is only the beginning of an increasing wave of ethnic tension.

The pundits also warned the authorities of making the wrong moves in attempts to solve the problems of inter-ethnic tension. For example, one of them warned those that would want to re-introduce the old Soviet system of resident permits (*propiska*). In present-day Russia, both governors of the provinces with predominantly Russian populations and rulers of ethnic enclaves would use their power to provide, or not, residence permits to people according to their ethnicity. This would lead to concentrations of ethnic minorities in restricted areas.

And ‘this approach has had the effect of creating a series of “quasi-states” within the borders of the Russian Federation, a development that by itself promotes both “apartheid and xenophobia”.’<sup>146</sup>

Muslim experts regard Kondopoga and similar events as incited by Jews. Den'ga Khalidov, a leading Russian Muslim intellectual, pointed out that it was actually the Jews who constituted the majority of the rich elite. They were afraid that the Russians, the poorest of the population, would rise and smash them. And they are the ones who constructed the myth about the Muslims constituting the major threat for Russians. It is not incidental that DPNI is led by Jews.<sup>147</sup> Kadyrov does not see a broad Jewish conspiracy. For him, the explanation is much simpler. He proclaims that the event was not spontaneous but was incited by a local mafia that engaged in a ‘change of the distribution of the sphere of influence.’<sup>148</sup> Mukaddas Bibarsov, who heads the Volga Region Spiritual Directorate of Muslims, is not taken with the conspiracy theory. He sees no roots for the Kondopoga violence at all, and he claims that Kondopoga was just a drunken brawl.<sup>149</sup> While for most Muslim commentators, ‘Kondopoga was an unfortunate event,’ this was not the case with members of the Chechen resistance, especially those who were centered on *Kavkaz Center*, which by 2006 had become, increasingly so, the mouthpiece for jihadists. *Kavkaz Center* took the opportunity of the Kondopoga event to attack those who advocated cooperation with the Russian government and provided a sort of twisted approval for Russian nationalist extremists.

For a long time, members of the Chechen resistance fought against those Russian Muslims whom they regarded as a sort of despised Quislings of the regime. The National Organization of Russian Muslims (NORM), which embraces ethnic Russians who have converted to Islam, is one of these organizations. NORM accused the ‘Muslim migrants’ of fomenting violence in Kondopoga.<sup>150</sup> The fact that *Kavkaz Center* placed this announcement on their site should just underscore the slavish nature of this organization and similar organizations that actually justify Russian oppression against Muslims. In the view of contributors to *Kavkaz Center*, the pogroms organized by nationalists are actually supported by FSB of the Russian Federation, that is, the Russian Secret Police.<sup>151</sup> While heaping scorn on what *Kavkaz Center* regarded as pseudo-Muslims, *Kavkaz Center* is actually ready to provide a sort of twisted blessing on Russian extremists. The reason for this strange blessing (strange at least at first glance) of those who expressed boundless hatred of Chechens is simple enough. The Russian nationalist extremists could well profess their hatred of Chechens. Still, they have the same goal as Chechens: the destruction of the present regime and, implicitly, by the very logic of events, the disintegration of the Russian Federation. Chechens want exactly the same, and for this reason the contributors to *Kavkaz Center* give them a sort of twisted blessing. Aleksei Ivanenko, a contributor to *Kavkaz Center*, stated that Kondopoga could well be

the beginning of a new type of Russian nationalism. There are, of course, many different types of nationalist groups in Russia, but not all of them could act. From this perspective, the Kondopoga event could be quite important. It might lead to the emergence of active nationalist groups and possibly even to a semi-underground military detachment that could attack both the minorities as well as the bases with OMON. In fact, in their view OMON would represent an anti-Russian regime with the non-Russian general Rashid Nurgaliev as OMON overlord.<sup>152</sup> As the author of the quoted article implied, Russian extremist nationalists might well be inspired in their violence by their hatred of Chechens. Still, by the logic of their actions, they will push Russia to disintegration and, if this happened, it would lead to the liberation of the Chechens and, in fact, of all oppressed minorities of Russia. And for this reason, nationalist violence should be praised.

### **Conclusion**

Kondopoga has many implications. To start with, it demonstrates the deep ethnic tensions in the post-Soviet era, which show no sign of significant declining in spite of the general improvement in living standards during Putin's tenure. In this context, many ethnic Russians regard the government as being on the side of the minorities, and as actually powerless to act. Many Russians believe that Putin is hostage to Kadyrov, and that the latter could indeed send troops to suppress the poor and rebellious Russians. Besides revealing deep-seated ethnic and actually social and quasi-social animosity between Moscow and provincial Russia – Kondopoga is a Russian provincial city where the living standards are much lower than in Moscow – the event analyzed also bears witness to an increasing sense of social maturity of the populace. It is true that the Kondopoga revolt was similar to many other manifestations of spontaneous violence since the end of the Gorbachev era, with social decomposition leading to the spread of criminalized anarchy and the rise of 'anomie.' While in Durkehim's reading 'anomie' is a marginal phenomenon in an otherwise healthy society of 'organic solidarity,' in late Soviet/early post-Soviet Russia, 'anomie' was a feature of the dominant group. Crime and other forms of a-social behavior were not the exception but a way of life for considerable segments of the Russian population if not for the majority. This sort of behavior can be easily discerned in the Kondopoga rioting. Still, there is another part to the story, which demonstrates the increasing political maturity of the Russian population. The attempt to create alternative political bodies and the integration of the spontaneous nationalistic animus in a broader protest indicates the involvement of DPNI. In fact, for the first time in post-Soviet history, an open revolt was launched with a quasi-political leader. This combination of pogrom-type violence with an attempt at political/social organization may well be compared with events in Russia in the late 19th and early

20th centuries, when, after the end of serfdom, Russia slowly developed modern capitalism. The wave of pogroms that followed the assassination of Alexander II by terrorists in 1881 did not lead to revolution. It would take a generation before the first revolution would erupt in Russia in 1905–1907 and still another ten years before the tsarist regime collapsed. The same could be said about the discontent in post-Soviet Russia. It would be naïve to assume that revolution is knocking at the door. The social discontent that had been sporadic but still ever present during Yeltsin's entire rule – including the strikes of miners who tried to block the major railroad tracks – did not lead to the collapse of the regime. Finally, ethnic riots are not just a feature of post-Soviet Russia. Ethnic riots had erupted several years before in France and not just in provincial towns hundreds if not thousands of miles from the capital but also in the French capital, Paris. The US can hardly be immune from the same problems. Ethnic and even more so racial troubles have periodically erupted in America's small and big cities, and with the most destructive consequences. After Hurricane Katrina, which literally washed away the law enforcement agencies in New Orleans, the city was transformed into a 'war zone' with a wave of looting and rape. Still, there were peculiar features to the Kondopoga riot. It was not just the fact that Kondopoga was only one among many cases of ethnic violence. In Europe and the US, it is the minorities who engage in violence. In Russia, it is the Russian majority that engages in violence. This does not mean that Kondopoga and similar events indicate the immediate collapse of the regime. Still, the very fact that it was young Russians – not aging pensioners or middle-aged people, as was the case in the Yeltsin era – that engaged in the protest, makes the society and government quite apprehensive, as is indicated by the broad public response. Indeed, it indicates that the deep-seated ills of Russian society could have powerful implications for the country's future.

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