

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Protest sentiments of the region's population in crisis

One form of social protest is the protest sentiments of the population, i.e., the expression of extreme dissatisfaction with their position in the current situation. In the present paper we make an attempt to trace the dynamics of protest potential in the region, draw a social portrait of the inhabitants of the region prone to protest behavior, identify the most important factors determining the formation of a latent protest activity, and identify the causes of the relative stability of protest potential in the region during the economic crisis.

The study was conducted on the basis of statistics and results of regular monitoring held by ISEDT RAS in the Vologda region.

Social conflict, protest behavior, protest potential, community, monitoring, social management, public opinion, crisis, socio-economic situation.



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In the contradictory trends in the socio-economic development of territories and the population's material welfare, the issue of socio-psychological climate in society, the escalation of internal contradictions and conflicts is being updated.

One form of conflict expressions is social protest. The concept of "social protest" in modern sociological literature covers a rather wide range of phenomena. In its most general form protest means "strong objection to anything, a statement of disagreement with anything, the reluctance of something" [1].

Social protest is considered as “challenging”, “denial” of the entire social reality, the very principles of social organization, and the rejection of any individual parts of political life, the resentment of the existing orders and institutions of government in general, and opposition to certain tendencies in politics [2].

Mass protest can be organized or spontaneous, direct or indirect, have the character of violence or nonviolence. There can be the following forms of protest: rallies, demonstrations, picketing, campaign of civil disobedience, strikes, hunger strikes, absenteeism, “protest vote”, terrorism, extremist actions, complaints, appeals to the courts, armed struggle, etc. [3].

In modern literature there are various conceptual approaches to the definition of models and forms of protest activity. In this case, the majority of researchers, talking about social protest, mean primarily the phenomena of active social action, real social behavior, focused at more or less profound social transformation, open population’s confrontation with the existing structures of authority and actions against the areas of government policy.

However, the peculiarity of the modern period in Russia is the weakening expression of social disturbance at the behavioral level, the development of latent forms of protest activity. So, according to statistics, since 2007 to 2009 the number of workers involved in strikes in Russia decreased from 2.9 to 0.01 thousand people [4].

At the same time, according to the Analytical Center of Yuri Levada, in 2009 – 2010, 27% of Russia’s population considered mass protests in the cities (areas) of their residence as possible, 20% did not exclude the likelihood of their participation in these actions [5].

In this regard, the identification and measurement of protest sentiments, i.e., the potential propensity of people to participate in protests are becoming particularly relevant and significant.

Since 1995, within the regular monitoring of public opinion in the territory of the Vologda oblast the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of RAS has been tracking the major trends in the protest sentiments of the region’s population¹. The protest potential is made up by the respondents who answer the question: “What measures are you willing to take to protect your interests?” in the following way: “I will take part in a rally, demonstration”; “will participate in strikes, protests”; “if necessary, I will take arms, go out to the barricades”. The idea is that a person admits the possibility of his or her participation in protests. Thus, the “protest group” is made up with the residents of the region, characterized by a certain emotional mood, which is not always identical to the active social behavior.

The research of potential propensity of people to participate in protest actions allows us to analyze various aspects of the phenomenon of social protest: First, it allows clarifying the nature of protest sentiments, namely, the mechanism of formation of attitudes of social discontent, as well as sources and factors contributing to the accumulation of protest sentiments. Secondly, the study of protest sentiments helps to trace their escalating into aggressive action, to identify trends in public opinion, which stimulate or, alternatively, limit the realization of social discontent at the behavioral level.

¹ The surveys are conducted 6 times a year on the even months. The total number of the polled is 1500 respondents in the cities of Vologda and Cherepovets, the Districts of Babayevo, Veliky Ustyug, Vozhega, Gryazovets, Kirillov, Nikolsk, Tarnoga, Sheksna.

The sample representativeness is provided by the following conditions:

- Ratio between urban and rural populations;
- Ratio between the inhabitants of settlements of various types (rural settlements, small and medium-sized cities);
- Sex and age structure of the adult population of the oblast.

The method of the survey is a poll by the place of respondents’ residence.

Sampling error does not exceed 3%.

Table 1. Dynamics of major indicators of economic development of the Russian Federation and the Vologda Oblast, in %

Indicator	2008 to 2007		2009 to 2008		2010 to 2009	
	RF	VO	RF	VO	RF	VO
Industrial Production Index	102.1	94.7	89.2	87.6	108.2	110.7
The index of agricultural products	110.8	99.5	101.2	97.3	88.1	92.8
The volume of retail trade	113.0	106.7	94.5	82.6	104.4	110.9
The volume of paid services	104.9	103.2	95.7	95.6	101.5	97.8
Real cash income	104.7	101.6	103.7	92.8	103.8	104.4
Registered unemployment rate, %	2.0	1.9	2.8	3.7	2.5	2.4

Source: Data from the Federal State Statistics Service (<http://www.gks.ru>).

Thirdly, the analysis of protest sentiments is needed to identify the social base, i.e., the category of persons who are likely to be engaged in active protest actions.

In this paper we analyzed the results of opinion polls conducted by ISEDT RAS in the Vologda oblast, which reflect the level of protest potential in the region, its social basis, the factors which determine the formation of a latent protest activity. The article proposes the further development of provisions nominated by the author earlier, contained in earlier papers on this subject [6].

A significant economic downturn, which came at the end of 2008 – the first half of 2009 affected Russia in general, and affected the economic and social development of each region. Among the territories most affected by the crisis, was the Vologda Oblast.

In 2010, mixed trends were observed in the development of economic and social sphere of the Vologda oblast (*tab. 1*). On the one hand, there was an increase in industrial production, the population's real incomes increased, the situation in the market of consumer goods improved, the level of registered unemployment decreased. On the other hand, the decline of agricultural production continued. With the overall growth of real incomes the volume of paid services to population is reducing, which is an indicator of the dominance of a limited model of consumption.

Despite the measures to overcome the consequences of the crisis taken at federal and

regional levels, the pre-crisis values for any of the indicators have not yet been achieved.

To analyze the main trends of socio-economic status, socio-political sentiments and social well-being of the population in the economic crisis, we used index analysis. The method of index constructing allows to reveal the proportion of positive and negative sentiments in society, to track dynamic changes in population estimates, and to assess the current social situation in terms of further development of the country and the region.

9 particular indexes have been calculated. The empirical base for indexes calculation is the data of regular monitoring conducted by ISEDT RAS in the Vologda Oblast.

To calculate each index the proportion of negative responses is subtracted out of the proportion of positive ones, then to the resulting value 100 is added, in order not to have negative values. Thus, totally negative responses would give the general index of 0, totally positive – 200, the balance of the first and second – 100 index, which is a neutral marker per se. Index value exceeding the border of 100 points confirms the prevalence of positive evaluations. Index value below 100 points shows that the negative estimates dominate the positive ones.

Indices calculated by this method are combined into three groups. The indices included in the first group, reflect the Vologda oblast population's perceptions about the economic situation of the country and the

Table 2. The index of estimates of the economic situation of the country, the index of estimates of the economic situation in the region and the index of expectations of the country's economy development

Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010
<i>The index of estimates of the economic situation of the country</i> (Question: "How do you estimate the country's economic situation?")	105.9	99.6	67.5	75.9
<i>The index of estimates the economic situation of the oblast</i> (Question: "How do you estimate the economic situation in the oblast?")	108.3	103.9	65.3	72.9
<i>The index of expectations of the country's economy development (1st year)</i> (Question: "Do you think the next 12 months will be a good or a bad time or whatever else for the economy?")	124.4	112.1	71.8	94.3

region and prospects for its development. The indices of the second group characterize satisfaction of current material well-being of families, wishes to change their financial position. The indices of the third group record the estimates of the political situation in the country, the attitude of the region's population to the authorities' activities.

As the results of calculations show, for the period from 2008 to 2009, the population's estimates of the current socio-economic situation in the country and the region deteriorated markedly. Thus, the estimate indexes of the economic situation of the country and the region in 2009 were established at the lowest marks for the entire period of measurement (68 and 65 points), indicating a significant preponderance of negative evaluations. In 2010, the rates of these indicators increased slightly, but they did not reach the pre-crisis level of 2007 – 2008. (*tab. 2*)².

On the background of worsening estimates of the current state the expectations of the population also become less favorable. The index of development prospects ratings of the country's economy declined in 2009 by 40 points. In 2010 this indicator has improved, but it still remains below the level of 2007 – 2008.

In 2009, there was a tendency to reduce the index of personal financial situation of the population and its prospects. Compared with the previous year these figures had fallen to 34 and 16 points (*tab. 3*). Deterioration of material

well-being assessments is associated with the rising cost of living and lower purchasing power of population's incomes in the region. Thus, between 2008 and 2009, the ratio of per capita income (estimated by the population) to the subsistence minimum decreased from 1.5 to 1.3. As a result the proportion of the oblast's residents with an average level of purchasing power of income ("money is enough to buy necessary goods") fell from 58 to 52% and the proportion of low-income categories ("money is enough in the best case only for food") increased from 30 to 40%, respectively. In 2010, these indicators increased (by 11 and 5 points respectively), but still remained below the pre-crisis level.

In crisis the structure of social self-identification of the region's population has also worsened: in 2009, this index decreased by 13 points and was below the limit of 100 points, indicating a preponderance of individuals with low socioeconomic status ("poor and beggary"). In 2010, the situation has not changed significantly.

Taking into account the significant reduction in indices reflecting the socio-economic situation in the country and the region, own material well-being, the pessimistic trend in the socio-political sentiments of the population should be also noted. Thus, the index rating of the political situation in the country between 2008 and 2009 dropped 20 points and was at 98 points which is below 100 points, reflecting the predominance of negative judgments of people about the socio-political climate in the country (*tab. 4*).

² Tables № 2-9 present the averaged data

Table 3. The index of estimates of current personal financial situation and index of estimates of prospects for the personal financial situation

Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010
<i>The index of estimates of current personal financial situation</i> (Question: "How do you estimate your financial situation: is it better or worse than it was a year ago?")	101.1	96.3	62.1	72.9
<i>The index of estimates of prospects for the personal financial situation</i> (Question: "Do you think that after a year your financial situation will be better or worse, or about the same as it is now?")	103.6	96.8	80.9	86.2
<i>The index of social identity</i> (Question: "Which category do you belong to?")	106.6	110.3	96.9	96.0

Table 4. The index of estimates of the country's political situation and indexes of estimates of authorities' activities

Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010
<i>The index of estimates of the country's political situation</i> (Question "How would you assess the political situation in the country?")	109.3	117.8	98.3	109.2
<i>Index of estimates of federal authorities' activities</i> (Questions: "How do you assess the current activities of the Russian President?"; "How do you assess the current activities of the Government of the Russian Federation?"; "How do you assess the current activities of the State Duma?"; "How do you assess the current activities of the Federation Council?")	129.1	137.2	126.8	121.4
<i>The index of estimates of regional and local authorities' activities</i> (Questions: "How do you assess the current activities of the regional governor?"; "How do you assess the current activities of the Legislative Assembly of the Oblast?"; "How do you assess the activities of heads of municipalities?"; "How do you assess the activities of local authorities' councils?")	116.6	120.7	113.7	111.9

The reduction of index of the political situation in the country is due to the deteriorating relations of the oblast's residents to the activities of authorities at different levels. Thus, the index of estimates of federal authorities³ in 2009 compared with 2008 has decreased from 137 to 127 points, regional and local authorities⁴ – from 121 to 114 points, respectively. However, it should be noted that the degree of trust in the authorities among the population of the region in the crisis of 2008 – 2009 remains at a fairly high level compared with the crisis of 1998 – 1999. This may be due to an active anti-crisis policy of the authorities: the adoption on the federal and regional levels of anti-crisis program, including, in particular,

the support of enterprises forming a company system and town, measures for conservation and development of small and medium enterprises, promoting employment, etc. In 2010 the assessments of the political climate in the country have become more favorable (the corresponding index rose by 11 points), while the indicators reflecting the population's attitude to the authorities, continued to decrease (by 6 and 2 points respectively).

In general, in 2009 81% of families in the oblast in one way or another felt the effects of the crisis (*tab. 5*). The first is the increase in prices for goods and services (72%). More than 40% of families faced a decrease in wages and social benefits. Approximately every fourth resident of the oblast indicates the delay of funds (27%). In addition, 29% of oblast's residents noted the depreciation of ruble savings of their families.

³ RF President, RF Government, the Chamber of the Russian Federal Assembly.

⁴ Governor, Legislative Assembly of the Oblast, heads of municipalities, local government councils.

Table 5. The share of the oblast's population who have felt the consequences of the crisis over the past six months (in% of respondents)

Consequences of the crisis	2009	2010	2010 to 2009
Increase in prices for consumer goods and services	72.1	52.0	- 20
Reduction (cutting) of wages and social benefits	41.6	28.5	- 13
Delays in wage and social benefits	26.7	19.5	- 7
Depreciation of ruble savings	28.8	15.4	- 13
Reduction, dismissal from the company	16.2	14.2	- 2
Closure, suspension of business	10.2	7.6	- 3
Total *	81.0	65.7	- 15

* All those who noted at least one of the enumerated consequences of the crisis for themselves and their families are taken into account.

In 2010 compared with 2009 the share of the oblast's residents who have felt certain consequences of the crisis reduced significantly. The number of those who suffered from the increase in prices for consumer goods and services, depreciation of the ruble savings, reduction (cutting) of wages and social benefits significantly decreased. However, despite the gradual overcoming of negative events, 2/3 of the oblast's residents said that over the past six months they had experienced at least one of these problems associated with the crisis.

Analysis of regular observations of the Vologda oblast showed that in the growing crisis processes in the economy of the country and the region in 2009, the residents' protest potential of Vologda oblast has increased slightly (from 20 to 22%), which is somewhat more than in 2007 – 2008 (*tab. 6*). Compared with the period of economic crisis in Russia in 1998 – 1999, protests of the population in 2009 are less pronounced (22 vs. 37%, respectively). In addition in 2009 the fraction of the adherents of the “peaceful” protest actions (“go out for a rally, demonstration” – 11%) dominated in the “protest group”, whereas in 1998 – 1999 most of the “protesters” expressed a willingness to radical action to protect their interests (“if necessary, I'm ready to take arms, go out to the barricades” – 15%). In 2010, under the reductive economic growth the potential protest activity of the population remained at the average indicators of 2007 – 2008.

Analyzing the data from surveys of the oblast's population for the period from 2007 to 2010, we have identified categories of people who differ in certain socio-psychological attitude and have a predisposition to action in the event of a conflict situation. In the years 2007 – 2010 the intention to participate in the protests by gender is much more pronounced with male representatives (on average 24%) compared with women (18%), i.e., men are more prone to dissent than women (*tab. 7*).

Propensity to engage in protest actions in the period from 2007 to 2010 is approximately equally peculiar to representatives of various age and educational categories (average 20%). Depending on the level of income the highest rate of social discontent is observed in the 20% group of the poorest (in average 24%) and in the 60% category of people with average incomes (21%). In the context of the oblast's territories no significant differences in the level of protest activity of the population is observed. Thus, the protest sentiments in 2007 – 2010 were expressed on the average by 20 – 22% of the residents of Vologda, Cherepovets and municipal districts of the oblast.

It should be noted that under the influence of different manifestations of the crisis in 2009 there were no significant changes in the group of “protesters”. There was a slight strengthening of dissent in the age groups of 30 to 55 and older, among people with specialized secondary education, undergraduate and

Table 6. Dynamics of protest potential (in% of respondents)

Answers	1998 – 1999	2000 – 2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Protest potential	37.3	27.0	20.7	19.6	21.9	20.0
I'll go out for a rally, demonstration	9.4	10.3	9.6	9.7	10.8	9.6
I will participate in strikes, protests	12.7	8.7	5.7	5.4	6.0	6.1
If necessary, I'm ready to take arms, go out to the barricades	15.3	8.0	5.3	5.1	5.0	4.3

Table 7. The dynamics of protest potential in different groups of population (the share of "protesters" in the total number of respondents in each category, in %)

		2007	2008	2009	2010
Gender	Male	23.6	23.2	25.1	22.2
	Female	18.3	16.8	19.3	18.3
Age	under 30	20.2	20.2	20.7	20.4
	30-55	20.8	20.0	22.6	21.6
	over 55	20.9	18.5	21.7	17.0
Education	post-primary and secondary	19.2	20.7	20.7	20.2
	specialized secondary	21.0	20.9	23.6	19.9
	undergraduate and higher	20.4	16.8	21.3	19.9
Income groups	20% of the poorest	23.9	24.8	24.3	23.9
	60% of the average standard	21.2	19.9	22.3	21.1
	20% of the richest	16.1	14.0	19.8	15.1
Territories	Vologda	21.4	21.9	23.5	22.4
	Cherepovets	20.3	17.2	21.2	21.1
	Districts	20.6	19.8	21.4	18.0

higher education, in the 60% group of middle-class and the 20% group of the most wealthy, as well as in Vologda and Cherepovets. In 2010, in terms of the improving economic situation in the country and the region, the percentage of the "protest group" has decreased in all socio-demographic groups of the oblast's population.

The highest level of potential protest activity is among those oblast's residents who evaluate the economic situation in Russia and the region negatively (an average of 32%). Among those who consider the economic situation in the country and the region as "very good or good", the share of "protesters" is an average of 18 and 17% respectively. It should be noted that in 2010 the indicator of protest potential in the category of people with negative assessments of the situation is 3 times higher than that of a category of people with opposing opinions. This was mainly due to the gradual decline in the protest mood of a group of people with positive assessments of the economic environment.

The measurement results allow to characterize the protest sentiments of population groups based on different estimates of their financial situation and social well-being.

Protest sentiments are more often inherent in the oblast's residents having negative characteristics of the material conditions of their families (on average – 32%). In the group of people considering their own material well-being as "very good or good" the protest potential is at lower elevations (average – 19%). Moreover, the gap between these categories in terms of potential protest in 2010 was 2.2 times (31% vs. 14%). This was due to reduction of dissent in the group with positive evaluations.

Protest potential is the highest among people who identify themselves to the categories of "the needy" and "the poor" (in the years of 2007 – 2010 on average – 28%). In the group of "the rich" and "having average income" for the period under review only 15% of the oblast's residents avoid the possibility of their participation in protests.

Throughout the whole period the protest potential among “the poor and the needy” exceeded the corresponding figure among the “rich and having average income” 1.2 – 1.5 times. In 2010, the gap was 2.5 times (30% vs. 12%). This was due to a decrease in the share of “protesters” among individuals with high and middle socioeconomic status.

The greatest propensity to protest manifestations in 2007 – 2010 is found among the residents of the region who have low purchasing power of income (“money is enough in the best case for food” – 25%). Moreover, during 2008 – 2010 protest sentiments in this category remained quite stable.

Depending on the assessment of social attitudes the greatest potential propensity to be engaged in mass protests in 2007 – 2010 is shown by people experiencing negative emotions (“stress, anger, fear, depression” – an average of 32%). The share of “protesters” in this category does not change significantly in 2008 – 2010. The share of “protesters” in the category of people who are in “good spirits, normal, smooth condition” averaged over the region during this period 16% and there is a clear tendency to decrease.

Potential protest activity is also characteristic to quite a significant proportion of the oblast’s population with low levels of human patience (“it is no longer possible to endure our plight” – 44% on average in 2007 – 2010). Protest sentiments among the part of the population which expressed positive opinions (“it is not so bad and you can live; it is hard to live, but you can tolerate”) are 2.5 times lower (17%) and have a downward trend.

Comparison of regular monitoring data allows determining the level of potential protest activity of the oblast’s residents, depending on their socio-political sentiments and attitudes to the authorities.

Thus, the Oblast’s residents, describing the political situation in Russia as “tense, critical and explosive”, are more prone to manifestations of protest than those who consider it “safe,

quiet” (30% to 15% on average in 2007 – 2010). Moreover, the level of protest potential decreases in the categories of the population with positive assessments of the socio-political climate in the country and does not change significantly among those who characterize it negatively.

In 2007 – 2010 on average more than 40% of the oblast’s residents, negatively evaluating the activities of the RF President and only 17% of the population who “completely and mostly approve” of the policy of the State’s head do not rule out their participation in the protest rallies. Moreover, among those who have negative attitude towards the activities of the State’s head, protest sentiments reached its highest level for the entire period of measurement in 2010 (46%). Furthermore, about 40% of the Vologda oblast’s residents who express their negative opinion about the course of economic reforms of the Russian President are willing to take active measures to protect their interests.

On average, about 40% of the population of the Vologda oblast who have negative attitudes to the activities of the Russian government, admit the possibility of their involvement in mass protests. And the exponent of protest potential in this category has an upward trend. In the category of oblast’s residents who have the opposite opinion, the protest group is more than 2 times smaller (on average 16%) and tends to decrease.

The highest level of protest potential, depending on the assessment of regional and local authorities in 2007 – 2010 is found among residents who disapprove of the work of the Governor, the heads of local administrations. The share of “protesters” in the respective categories is respectively 35% and 30% and it remains practically unchanged throughout the period from 2008 to 2010. Among residents of the region who fully and largely endorse the work of the oblast’s head and the heads of local administrations, the protest potential is on average 16% and it is gradually decreasing during the period under consideration.

Thus, the studies have shown that in a crisis the highest level of potential protest activity is characteristic for the categories of the region's residents negatively characterizing socio-economic and political situation in the country and the region, and their own financial situation, those who do not approve of the authorities, experience negative emotions. Moreover, in these categories the propensity to participate in protests during the measurement period does not tend to decrease and even increase.

Comparative analysis of a group of individuals prone to dissent, and "the rest" of the oblast's residents shows the conventional boundaries between these two groups (*tab. 8*).

Thus, in the protest group the proportion of people with negative assessments of the economic situation of the country and the region, of the authorities, their own financial situation and social well-being in 2008 – 2010 is only 1.2 – 1.8 higher. In the period from 2008 to 2009 the gap between the "protesting" and "not protesting" inhabitants of the oblast significantly decreased. This was mainly due to the increase in the proportion of negative ratings among both the "protesters" and the rest of the region's population.

Rather conventional boundaries between these two categories are also shown by the data obtained from responses to a question regarding the impact of different manifestations of the crisis (*tab. 9*).

Table 8. Proportion of people with negative assessments in the potential protest group and among the rest of the population

2007		2008		2009		2010	
Protest potential	The rest	Protest potential	The rest	Protest potential	The rest	Protest potential	The rest
Proportion of the population assessing the economic situation in the country negatively							
24.4	12.6	29.2	15.4	50.6	38.5	52.4	26.7
Proportion of the population assessing the economic situation in the Oblast negatively							
24.3	11.6	27.4	15.2	52.3	40.3	55.7	28.7
Proportion of the population assessing the financial situation of the family negatively							
35.5	18.8	39.7	20.1	47.4	28.6	50.5	28.5
Proportion of population with a low estimate of incomes purchasing power ("money is enough only for food")							
40.1	35.1	36.6	29.0	45.0	38.9	48.0	32.7
Proportion of the population not approving of the RF President's activity							
21.5	8.9	19.3	8.2	33.1	12.9	43.2	12.8
Proportion of the population not approving of the Governor' activity							
34.5	19.0	35.2	17.6	41.0	20.9	53.6	20.8
Proportion of the population with a negative assessment of their sentiments («feel stress, anger, fear, anguish»)							
42.8	24.6	39.6	23.7	48.3	24.7	53.8	27.7

Table 9. Proportion of individuals who have felt the impact of different crisis effects on themselves and their family members in the protest potential group and among the rest of the population

Consequences of the crisis	<i>Over the past six months</i>			
	Protest potential		The rest	
	2009	2010	2009	2010
1. Reduction (cutting) of wages and social benefits	46.7	35.5	40.3	26.8
2. Delays in wage and social benefits	32.0	22.5	25.4	18.8
3. Reduction, dismissal from the enterprise, which employed	18.9	16.2	15.5	13.7
4. Closure, suspension of the enterprise	13.2	8.7	9.5	7.4
5. Depreciation of ruble savings	31.3	16.7	28.2	15.1
6. Increase in prices for consumer goods and services	70.4	54.4	72.5	51.4
Total	80.5	69.8	81.1	64.6

Thus, in 2009, more than 80% of the representatives of the protest group, and of “not protesting” over the past six months have felt the impact of the crisis processes on themselves and the members of their families. In 2010, this figure fell among both the “protesters” and the category of “the rest” and made up 70% vs. 65%. In both considered groups, the proportion of the region’s residents who have felt the impact of such adverse effects as a reduction and delay of salary, reduction or dismissal from the enterprises, devaluation of ruble savings, increased prices for consumer goods and services are close enough and have a unidirectional trends for the period of 2009 – 2010.

This fact indicates that when a certain situation happens, a category of people expressing their intention to participate in protests could significantly expand. This indicates a potential prerequisite for the preservation of dissent, and also creates a danger of increased social tension even in the case of a slight deterioration of the economy.

Thus, the analysis of statistical data, as well as the results of sociological measurements recorded a fall in the main economic indicators in the Vologda oblast in crisis, as well as a deterioration of the value judgments of the population on socio-economic and socio-political situation, their own material well-being, social sentiment.

Against the background of these processes, the level of hidden protest activity of the population has not significantly changed. In 2010, the rate of the declared protest returned to the level of 2007 – 2008. Low growth rates of protest potential of the Vologda oblast’s population, in our opinion, are due to several reasons.

Firstly, the low readiness of the oblast’s residents to take part in protests may be associated with the peculiarities of the political culture of the population. In Russia, the dominant political culture is the yielding one

which is characterized by the orientation of the majority to the passive attitude towards the political system, to the general recognition of the special authority of the governing body. The bearer of political culture of this kind is instinctively or consciously debarred from participation in political life, as he or she is not ready for it because of ignorance and misunderstanding, or rejection of the mechanisms and principles of the political system.

Secondly, a high level of the population’s social patience reserve can be called as a deterrent to the growth of social tension in the region. Even in times of crisis in 2009 the vast majority of people in the region (72%) believed that “it is possible to live” and “it is possible to endure”, and only 18% of the population exhausted the limits of their patience (for comparison: in 1998 – 1999 – 42 and 49% respectively). The basis for such attitudes may be a relatively high level of material prosperity achieved by the population during the years of stable development. Even in times of crisis, despite a significant deterioration in welfare and social well-being of the oblast’s residents, in 2009, 40% of the population had a low level of income purchasing power, 45% of the oblast’s residents identified themselves as “the poor and the needy”. For comparison, in crisis times of 1998 – 1999 the respective categories were 71 and 66%.

It should also be noted that in the 2000’s rather strong mechanisms for adapting the population to a changing social environment have formed. Therefore, in crisis, transitional period, people consider seeking additional earnings and other income sources, i.e. active adapting and adjusting to changing life conditions as the most important thing. A significant portion of the disaffected is inclined rather to the adaptation than to protest activity. Propensity for social adjustment in this case plays the role of a “shock absorber”, a “buffer” of social discontent, which does not allow the

latter to be transformed into a mass protest. According to the polls conducted in 2009, in terms of deteriorating financial position under the influence of different manifestations of the crisis, most people in the region were planning to “find additional sources of income” (42%) or “reduce costs, save on everything” (35%). Thus, people consider the search for additional earnings and other income sources but not being involved in the protests as the main way of solving personal financial problems in a crisis, transitional society.

Thirdly, a high level of trust to the authorities is very important for maintaining social stability. Thus, in 2009, approving evaluations of the Russian President's activity were expressed by nearly two-thirds of the region's inhabitants (in 1998 – 1999 – only 11%), of the Russian Government – about a half (in 1998 – 1999 – 24%). Around a half of the population appreciated the regional Governor's activity positively (in 1998 – 1999 – 30%), the local administrations heads' activity – more than 40% (in 1998 – 1999 – 30%). As noted above, in crisis there has happened a significant reduction in the approval of the authorities at various levels, but this did not entail the protest potential strengthening. The growth of dissent is inhibited by low ability of the Russian system of political representation to integrate the interests of individual groups. The most revealing in this respect is the level of confidence to the parties, which are intended to serve for the interests of different social groups.

Thus, in 2008 – 2009 the proportion of the region's residents, who “completely and basically trust” the political parties and movements, remained at 15-20%. This suggests that there is no public power (or group of powers) which really reflects and is able to accumulate the interests of the general population in Russia and in the region.

The results of the sociological dimensions allow noting the continuing closeness of indicators of economic status and political sentiments of the protest group representatives and “the rest” of the oblast's residents. This indicates a prerequisite for strengthening dissent in the case of deterioration of the socio-economic situation, and creates a danger of increased social tension in the short term.

The study identified the risk groups: the oblast's residents aged 30 – 55 and older, representatives of the 20% group of the least provided for, the residents of Vologda and Cherepovets whose protest potential exceeds the average oblast indicator. Moreover, the protest sentiments are intensified among the oblast's residents negatively characterizing socio-economic and political situation in the country and the region, their own financial situation, who do not approve of the authorities and experience negative emotions.

To prevent destabilization of social relations the government must take effective measures aimed at strengthening the socio-economic status of the population (first of all – the most socially vulnerable categories of the population), reduction of poverty and excessive social differentiation in the region.

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