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**Analysis of the interaction of the social
opposition and the government in the
current Russian Federation.**

Bachelor thesis

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby attest that this thesis and its content is based on my own work, unless stated otherwise. All the references and sources of information used to compose this thesis have been quoted and acknowledged, under the supervision of my supervisor.

In Hradec Králové 25.06.2020

Signature

Abstract

This bachelor thesis deals with the analysis of the relationship between the social opposition and the government in the current Russian Federation. The aim is to research how the opposition assesses the government and how the government responds. In other words, the work will focus on the discourse of the government and social opposition and its evolution over the time.

In order to successfully accomplish this research, methods of qualitative textual analysis and discourse analysis will be applied.

In this research, data will be drawn primarily from Russian primary sources such as opposition organization documents, local and global media and newspaper articles, government press releases. In addition, professional literature is to be used, especially in the theoretical part.

Key words: Russian Federation, opposition, protests, political discourse

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou vztahu mezi sociální opozicí a vládou v současné Ruské Federaci. Cílem je prozkoumat jak opozice hodnotí vládu a jak na to vláda reaguje. Jinými slovy práce se zaměří na diskurz vlády a sociální opozice a jeho evoluci v čase.

Pro úspěšné splnění tohoto výzkumu, budou aplikovány metody kvalitativní textové analýzy a diskursivní analýzy.

V tomto výzkumu budou data čerpána předně z ruských primárních zdrojů jako jsou dokumenty opozičních organizací, místní média y novinové články, vládní tisková prohlášení. Kromě toho práce využije odbornou literaturu především v teoretické části.

Klíčová slova: Ruská Federace, opozice, protesty, politický diskurz

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1. Introduction

Russia is a conservative country with a strong tendency of accumulating powers in hands of ruling elite. For all ruling elites opposition was usually one of the main enemy in achieving and protecting their interests and needs. According to Freedom House, Russia is not a free state with the limitation of political rights, that why it is complicated to talk about parliament opposition, that is weak. It exists only as a decoration for a ruling party, to imitate the existence of a democracy in the country (Freedom House 2020). That is why the main force on the opposition field is social opposition.

This thesis will analyze the interaction of the social opposition and the government in the current Russian Federation in a discursive way. This topic is certainly interesting, because it is clear that it is not possible to study the political situation in a country based only on an analysis of ruling groups, so it is important to analyze the opposition and its activity, as well. Very substantial, but also very complicated, is an analysis of the opposition in non-democratic regimes, whether it is a hybrid or an outright authoritarian, because there is a need to reckon with all the features of a non-democratic regime.

According to the theory of hybrid regimes, which will be presented in theoretical framework of this work, Russia could be considered as a country with a hybrid regime.

Based on this, the work will study the opposition in non-democratic regimes, its occurrence and the goals it pursues. Primarily this work will be focused on the anti-systemic or social opposition. Social opposition is a non-parliament opposition, mostly consists of social and political movements, politically active citizens and charismatic leaders. Its main feature is rejecting dominant

political value system. Non-systemic opposition is distinguished by fierce confrontation with the current government, aimed at using not always legal methods of waging political aims. It is the use of such methods to achieve this goals that is reflected in the status of these political forces, which is often illegal or semi-illegal (Medvedev, Borysenko, 2007).

The main driving force for social opposition are protesting movements and sociopolitical discourse in the society, providing by the Internet and media. Russia is not very famous for its protesting movements, though, it is not something extraneous for the county. Therefore, during the modern Russian history there are several very significant protests on which this work will be focused on. Thus, the ancestors of the protest movement that now exists in Russia, were the protests of 2011-2013, the so-called "Snow Revolution". The reasons were: dissatisfaction with the results of the elections to the State Duma, the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia, suspicions of falsification of the elections in favor of the United Russia, main political party, and V.V. Putin, politics of Putin and the United Russia (Sachnin, Alexei 2014). The "Snow Revolution" did not reach its goals; nevertheless, it gave a push for the future protests. The next wave of protests was in 2014-2016, it was based on dissatisfaction with Putin's foreign policy. The latest wave of protest movements started in 2017 with massive anticorruption protests against the Prime Minister D. Medvedev. Thus, this work will cover protesting movements in these three periods:

- from 2011 to 2013
- from 2014 to 2016
- from 2017 to 2018

As was mentioned, another driving force for the social opposition is a political discourse in the society, providing by the Internet and media. This is the main topic of this research. So, based on these protest activity, this work will study

the political discourse between the social opposition and the government in the current Russia.

Based on the above-mentioned issues, this research is seeking for an answer:

- How the political discourse between the social opposition and the government in Russia has been changed from 2011 to 2018?

The methodology of the research is a discursive analysis. It helps to study the political discourse between the social opposition and the government in current Russia. Political discourse helps to plunge deeply into the issue and study the subject of research from different angles. M. Foucault's book "Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on language" was very useful in choosing the right method for this research.

The theoretical part of this work will describe the concepts and theories that will help with this research, such as the theory of hybrid regimes, the theory of the opposition in the hybrid regimes and some other. They will help to create a solid theoretical basis for a more complete and in-depth study of the topic.

In the analytical part of work will be analyzed the current political situation in Russia. With the help of processed information, I will analyze the government's reaction to the actions of the non-systemic opposition and its response and vice versa. The information and data used for the research were gathered from different sources. The sources include both printed and online documents. In this work public interviews with politicians, leaders of the opposition, civilians, documents and declarations of opposition organizations, articles from various local and international media sources will be analyzed. All of the data are from open sources. All of the data is available online due to the specifics of the research. The used written materials are in

three languages: Russian, English and Czech. However, the sources I am going to analyze are predominantly in Russian.

This work consists of eight chapters including the introduction, where the main problem and research questions are defined. The second chapter consists of three theories: concept of the hybrid regime, the theory of the opposition in the hybrid regime and the theoretical definition of tools and strategies of interaction. The third chapter determinates the methodology of the research. The fourth chapter is the analysis of interaction between the government and the opposition in Russia, based on three periods (2011-2013, 2014-2016, and 2017-2018). The fifth chapter is the analysis of the political discourse based on three periods (2011-2013, 2014-2016, and 2017-2018). The conclusion of the thesis includes the answers to the research questions and outcomes of the research. Then there is the list of abbreviations, full list of written sources in bibliography and the appendix A.

2. Theoretical framework

To study the interaction of the social opposition and the government, it will be necessary to use the theoretical base of several areas. Firstly, it is important to characterize and describe the current political regime that exists in Russian Federation. Secondly, based on this, the features of the opposition in countries with such a political regime will be studied. Thirdly, on the basis of the above points in this part will be characterized and defined the basic strategies and the tools that both actors can use in a relation to each other

2.1. Concept of hybrid regimes

The phenomenon of hybrid regimes emerged at the end of the 20th century, in the connection with the growing number of newly democratized countries, and therefore there are various disputes and differences in the concept of the phenomenon. Among the states that belong to hybrid regimes, are included both rich and poor, both small and large countries, which means that this type of regime does not depend on the prosperity of the state or its territory (Wolfgang 2010: 21). The hybrid regime is an illiberal or defective democracy, the regime where only some democratic mechanisms are used, in other words, such a regime only imitates democracy (Hloušek, Kopeček 2002: 286). According to Larry Diamond, the hybrid regime is pseudo-democracy. It is a regime that is neither purely democratic nor entirely authoritarian. Hybrid regimes represent institutional hybridity characterized by the merging of democratic and authoritarian mechanisms within a given policy. (Diamond 2002: 24-25).

The ideal trichotomy classification of political regimes should look like the spectrum, where at one side of it is a democracy, at the other side is authoritarianism and in the middle is situated a hybrid regime, fulfilling only some of the conditions of democratic regimes (Bílek 2015a: 219). To define

where the hybrid starts and a democracy ends, it would be useful to give a positive definition of democracy, at least briefly:

- a) universal suffrage,
- b) free, regularly recurring competitive elections,
- c) the existence of more than one political party,
- d) freedom and pluralism of the media (Morlino 2009: 278).

It is also necessary to emphasize that such kind of a regime must provide guarantees of civil and political rights which should be implemented in the above four aspects (Morlino 2009: 278).

It differs from the liberal democracy in the degree of the competitiveness of the elections, when it is lower in competitive authoritarianism. The opposition faces various obstacles here, such as unequal access to the media, harassment of opposition candidates, and sometimes manipulation of election results. Journalists, opposition candidates or critics of the regime could be attacked or arrested in various ways (Levitsky, Way 2002: 53-54).

According to above information, Russia could be concerned as a country with a hybrid regime. Obviously, that Russia is not a democracy, but it is also not a country with authoritarian regime (Hale, Henry 2009). The key factors in considering Russia as a hybrid regime should be the presence of a multi-party system and the holding of the elections, although their competitiveness remains a question.

2.2. The opposition in hybrid regimes

The opposition in the non-democratic regimes is undoubtedly different from the opposition in consolidated democracies. The reasons are in nature of individual regimes. The approach of the ruling elite to the opposition is

different, as well as the attitude, aims and strategies of the opposition to the government.

In this chapter, will be described the theoretical framework for the concept of the opposition in non-democratic regimes, because Russia is example of non-democratic, hybrid, regime. For this, I have chosen the comprehensive definition by Petr Hlaváček from his work “Definition and structure of opposition in non-democratic regime”. Hlaváček considers the opposition in non-democratic regimes as a “conscientious and declared political conflict of interests and values of one or more actors in society or politics in relation to the existing government and with the expected impact on it. The conflict arises independently from the government and without its admission, but with attempts by the authorities to manage and control it” (Hlaváček, Petr 2011:122).

Moreover, in his work, he identified five types of opposition in non-democratic regimes. They are:

1. de facto opposition - conflict of interests and values incompatible with the regime,
2. semi-factual opposition - conflict of interests and values on the border of incompatibility with the regime,
3. specific opposition - conflict of interests and values internally compatible with the regime,
4. constructive opposition - conflict of interests and values conditionally compatible with the regime,
5. formal opposition - non-existent conflict of interests and values (Hlaváček, Petr 2011:125).

In this research I will be focused on the “de facto opposition”, due to the specific of the research. “De facto opposition” is a non-systemic opposition arising and acting independently, excluding the direct influence of the

components of a current regime. The conflict of interests and values is primarily associated with doubting the legitimacy of the regime and seeking to eliminate and replace it (Hlavacek, Petr 2011:126).

In the context of Russia, the term “social opposition” means a combination of formal and informal organizations and leaders of public opinion, characterized by the following features:

- strongly negative perception of the figure of Vladimir Putin as a backbone figure in Russian politics;
- non-recognition of parliamentary parties in as a “full-fledged” opposition;
- the use of illegal methods of political struggle (with the exception of extremist actions) (Ponomarev, Mailis 2018:110).

2.3. Theoretical definition of tools and strategies of interaction

The interaction between the government and the opposition is based on a number of different means, which both actors use against each other, and these tools are always used as part of a specific strategy to achieve their goals.

In non-democracy, the regime’s approach to the opposition can take the form of harsh repression such as the arrest, torture or even assassination of opposition leaders, possibly entire groups, it tries to weaken, appease, neutralize or turn the opposition to its side. On the contrary, the opposition has the opportunity to seek the overthrow (coup) or gradual weakening of the regime through mass protests and general strikes, appeals to the illegitimacy, brutality or corruption of the regime, seeking "soul mates" outside and inside the ruling establishment, the mobilization of foreign actors or the unification of opposition groups (Huntington, Samuel 2008: 136-137, 149-151).

Another tool, which is widely used in discourse between the opposition and the government, is populism. Populism is a political strategy used by a charismatic actor referring to the people as a power base through elections or plebiscites, while their mutual relationship is clearly hierarchical but not organized. On the other hand, populism is understood as a very effective tool for disqualifying the opponent, suppressing the political activity of the opposition or attacking the freedom of speech (Dvoraková, Buben, Němec 2012: 15, 120, 131).

In hybrid regimes there are many non-democratic practices that the ruling establishment uses to paralyze its opponents, like changing constituencies, misuse of public funds or buying votes, the impossibility of the opposition to implement its functions, interference with the sovereignty of the judiciary system, etc. (Schedler, Andrease 2002: 42-46).

Another very significant tool, which use both sides, is media, including social media. Probably the largest contribution of social media and especially of the Internet is the ability to spread the news and opinions in the society, detect corruption and other mistakes of the regime, deepen participation of the civilians or convene protests (Diamond, Larry 2010: 70). On the other side, media could be very destructive in hands of the regime. In an overwhelming number of cases, the ruling establishment has more power, more resources and finances to use media as a tool against the opposition. Pro-government media helps to maintain the non-democratic regime, whether it is against the mobilization of the opposition and at the same time expanding the network of supporters, framing debates, spreading propaganda, revealing preferences or coordinating elites. To sum up, the co-optation of media allows the ruling establishment to obtain previously hidden or distorted information about public opinion, and manipulate it. It also could be used to increase transparency and performance of local officials, prevent demonstrations or

riots and strengthen the legitimacy of the regime (Gunitsky, Seva 2015: 42-43).

Political discourse is in the core of interaction of the government and the opposition. There are different strategies in the discourse analysis. Namely,

- The strategy of self-presentation. Usage of plural form instead of singular, for example, “We choose” instead of “I choose”
- The strategy of familiarity. Connecting with the public by mutual themes, for example “We love our country”
- The strategy of contrast that allows opposing one subject to another.
- The strategy of discredit that allows clouding the opponent.
- The strategy of forming an emotional exposure provides by the appealing to values of public.
- The interpretation of information strategy. The strategy is realized by the tactics of the admitting a problem and the tactics of the appealing to the positive aspects (Sukhanova, Anastasiya. 2017: 160-163)

3. Methodology

To answer the research question, mentioned in the introduction, discourse analysis was chosen, as the most appropriate method of the research. To study the possible changes in the discourse between the government and the opposition, were chosen three stages from the history of modern Russia (2011-2013; 2014-2015; 2017 to present times)

To start, there is a need to define what the discourse is and how to analyze the political discourse.

Discourse is an expression of a particular way of using communication in the production of meanings related to a topic (Cholt, Jan 2006: 18). It reflects the ideas of the exact time, its value and ideology (Wodak, Meyer 2002, 1). The word discourse came from the Latin word “discurrere”, which meaning is, to start talking, to speak, to talk about a topic. It is a general approach to the social reality, which often indicates significantly different approaches to the study of creation of meanings in interpersonal interaction (Vávra 2008: 204). Thoughts, representations, argumentation strategies, how they create identities, how they place actors or ideology can be identified in statements related to the topic. The connection between discourse and the power is important. Actors gain power through testimonies because they give a position to both themselves and others through speech (Cholt, Jan 2006: 20).

The interdisciplinary use of word “discourse” appeared in 60s of 20th century. Michel Foucault in his work “Archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language” developed the new concept of discourse. Foucault rethought the views on language: language is no longer just a way of communication, but a certain coordination network that outlines and predicts the movement of our thoughts and the telling about the reality. He included in the context of the discourse the consideration of power relations and other ideological forms,

under the influence of which the discourse takes on socially relevant significance (Foucault, 2002:93-96).

To talk about political discourse in Russia, I would like to use the work by Lidia Timofeeva “Power and the opposition in Russia: problems of political discourse” 2007. Timofeeva’s term of “discourse” is a social dialogue, occurring through public institutions between public and political actors. Political discourse is the exchange of reasonable positions and views in accordance with certain rules, as a result, of which actions are taken to solve socially significant problems. The peculiarity of the political discourse of the authorities and the opposition is that their goals in this communication are initially ambivalent and conflicting. On the one hand, this is a mutual adaptation of the practices and prospects of their activities through a socially oriented political dialogue in order to confirm the legitimacy of everyone in the eyes of the people. On the other hand, the desire for a one-sided victory in the field of communication with the goal of gaining a sufficient resource of votes to win the election. (Timofeeva, Lidia 2007, 1-4).

For the purpose of the discourse analysis in this work I will use texts from various Russian and international media sources, like Interfax, BBC, RIA News, RBC, Svoboda, etc. Unfortunately, there are not so many scientific articles about the topic of the research, due to the particularity of this research. The problematic relations between the government and the opposition in Russian Federation is not widely studied both in Russia and abroad. In this case, this work could be considered as the unique or one of the few in this topic.

4. Interaction between the social opposition and the government in the current Russian Federation

This chapter will present the chronology of interaction between the social opposition and the government in the current Russian Federation. Data, which will be presented below, will be used then in the future analysis of political discourse. The chapter consists of three sub-chapters: interaction between the social opposition and the government in 2011 – 2013 in 2014 – 2016 and in 2017-2018.

4.1. Interaction between the social opposition and the government in 2011 – 2013

This period is one of the most significant in Russian modern history. The protest movement in 2011-2013, so-called “Snow Revolution” in English speaking sources and co-called “Bolotnaya Revolution” in Russian speaking sources, related to the political events of the fall of 2011 that shocked the country's political life. A rally on the Bolotnaya Square was the beginning of the radical changes in the stagnated Russian political arena over the last decade.

Multiple mass political protests of Russian citizens began after the falsified elections in the Federal Assembly, State Duma, on December 4, 2011 (Forbes 2011). Protests continued during the presidential election campaign and after the presidential election held on March 4, 2012, in which Vladimir Putin won in the first round (Der Spiegel 2012). The last attempts to change the political situation were made in summer of 2013. (BBC News 2013).

On December 10, a civil rally was held on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow, which became the largest opposition rally of disagreement with the results of the December 4 parliamentary elections. According to the main Moscow Police Department (MPD), the total number of participants in the coordinated

rally on December 10 was about 25 thousand people. Protests also took place in a number of cities in Russia and abroad (RIA News 2011).

One of the leaders of this protest was Boris Nemcov. In his interview, he described the goals of this protest. Those were:

1. Immediate release of political prisoners.
2. Cancellation of the results of falsified elections.
3. The resignation of Vladimir Churov, the head of the Central Election Commission, and the investigation of his activities.
4. Investigation of all facts of fraud at the polling stations.
5. Registration of opposition political parties.
6. Conducting an open and fair elections

He also mentioned that the amount of people was much bigger than it was claimed by the MPD. It was more than a hundred thousand people (Nemcov, Boris 2011).

On December 24, 2011, a large rally was hold on Academician Sakharov Avenue in Moscow and a series of rallies in other cities of Russia. This time the rally gathered even more participants - up to 120 thousand (RBC 2011).

Both of these rallies were coordinated with the government and did not lead to police detentions (RIA News 2011). This is the first time when systemic and non-systemic political parties have come together. This is the first time when the rally was clearly political, and all the participants, without exception, supported its demands (Nemcov, Boris 2011). At those rallies, for the first time, all kinds and sectors of the opposition united. Before, the left and the right sectors, represented by liberals and nationalists, defended and supported exclusively their interests. This was the main idea of the organizers, such as Boris Nemtsov, Eduard Limonov, Aleksei Navalny and the others:

the idea of uniting all segments of the population who are dissatisfied with the existing regime (Smirnova 2012: 19).

Another feature of those protests was the active use of social media to promote and spread the information about the protests. Representatives lead the political campaign and they also coordinated with each other and civilians throughout the Internet and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Vkontakte). It is worth to notice that most of the opposition figures and the opposition parties had an account on social networks (Eliseeva 2016: 249-250).

The presidential election on March 4, where Vladimir Putin was running for his third term, gave a rise to a new wave of rallies in winter and spring of 2012. An anti-Putin course has been added a response to the recent demands on the revision of elections to the State Duma.

Thus, on February 4, a month before the elections, two rallies were held. One "For Fair Elections" on Bolotnaya Square, this protest was against Putin's re-election. "Not a single vote for Putin, we demand fair elections", - were the words of the organizer of this protest, Vladimir Ryzhkov (Gazeta.ru 2012). Another "Anti-Orange" rally was on Poklonnaya Hill. It was pro-government rally. Its goal was to discredit the protesters against Putin, the main thesis was that the protesters on Bolotnaya Square planned to make the "Orange Revolution", as it was in Ukraine in 2004-2005 (Gazeta.ru 2012).

The main Moscow Police Department is keeping up with numbers of participants in the rallies. An interesting feature was that the MPD underestimated the quantity of protesters on Bolotnaya and overestimated the number of protesters on Poklonnaya. Thus, instead of 120 thousands on Bolotnaya, the main Moscow Police Department counted 36 thousands (Gazeta.ru 2012). Instead of 50 thousands on Poklonnaya the department counted 128 thousands (Lenta.ru 2012).

Moreover, participants of the rally on Poklonnaya, most of whom were state employees, complained to reporters that they had to come to the rally because of the threat of losing their jobs (Gazeta.ru 2012). Some of the participants got a compensation of 500 rubles. One website offered a “side job”. For 500 rubles, it was necessary to spend two hours at the rally on Poklonnaya, they also offered hot food and drinks, including alcohol (Radio Svoboda 2012). Another peculiar fact, the Prime Minister Vladimir Putin paid the fine of 1000 rubles for the overcrowding on the rally (NTV 2012).

On the March 4, 2012 presidential elections were held, where Vladimir Putin scored 63, 6% of vote. The elections were falsified; statistical analysis shows the presence of 9 million “suspicious” votes in favour of Vladimir Putin. On a web-page “Karta Narushenij” (Violation Map) were 5228 messages about violations during the elections (Gazeta.ru 2012).

This led to further rallies in the spring of 2012. On March 5 and 10, 2012, two rallies were held in Moscow, each of them, according to various estimates, it gathered from 10 to 30 thousand people. The police aggressively dispersed the rallies. Police detained about a thousand people in Moscow. Among those, who ended up in the police stations were opposition leaders Alesei Navalny, Ilya Yashin and Sergei Udaltsov (NEWSru 2012).

The largest spring protest rally was held on May 6 in Moscow, it was called the “People’s March” or the “March of the Millions”. It was a protest against the inauguration of Vladimir Putin. Participants from other cities of Russia came to the protest march. A few days before the event, police in several cities tried to obstruct the movement of buses and trains with the protesters and the members of the opposition. At least, more than a thousand people from all over Russia could not come to Moscow (Echo 2012). This opposition rally, likewise the previous ones, was planned to be completely peaceful. However, the march of civilians on Bolotnaya Square ended in fierce clashes with the

police. Sergei Udaltsov, Boris Nemtsov and Alexei Navalny were detained alongside with another 400 people. One person died and dozens of others were injured (Lenta.ru 2012).

Protesters were arrested according to the articles of “participating in the riots” and “using violence against the police”. That led to criminal investigations. This process has been called the “Bolotnaya Square Case”. The world community and human rights activists acknowledged the case is political, and by decision of the European Court of Human Rights, most of the detainees got compensations (RBC 2017). Criminal cases against the riots were opened on the same day, on May 6. Over five years, 35 people have become accused; some of them got real prison sentences for participating in the "March of Millions" (Meduza 2017).

The protests continued in 2012 and 2013, but the number of participants dropped significantly and did not exceed 30 thousand people in each of them. The aggressive behavior of the police and the criminal cases against the participants of the “March of Millions” influenced the activity of people. People became more cautious, afraid of prison terms. In addition, people's motivation also dropped because the protests did not achieve their goals. State Duma and presidential elections have not been revised and political prisoners were not released (Sachnin, Alexey 2014:194-195).

In 2013 it became clear that the protest movement weakened, and the authorities strengthened their positions. Back in 2012, the parliament adopted several laws that significantly worsen the life of civil society. Immediately after the events of May 6, a law was adopted which complicated the holding of rallies and protests. Now their organizers will be responsible even for the slightest violation during the rallies; fines and sanctions have been increased significantly (Sachnin, Alexey 2014:194-195).

One of the main signs of the reactionary policy in the country were political repressions. I have already stated above about the "Bolotnaya Square Case ", but besides it, during this period, many other political processes took place. Thus, in August 2012, the worldwide famous punk group "Pussy Riot" received a two-year prison sentence for their punk "moleben" (supplicatory prayer) against Putin (RIA 2012). Regular arrests of the opposition leaders also took place at this time. For example, Alexei Navalny in 2011-2012 was imprisoned for around one month, because of his political activity (DW.com 2018). Moreover, in 2013 he was involved in two criminal cases. For one of them he received five years in prison, but later the sentence was changed to probation term (RIA 2013). The second criminal case, which ended in 2014, he received 3.5 years of probation (Interfax 2014). Pending a sentence, he spent 8 months under house arrest (DW.com 2018). Supporters of Alexei Navalny, as well as major human rights organizations, a number of experts and foreign states condemned the sentence, calling it politically motivated (Amnesty International 2013), (Lenta.ru 2013). On October 17, 2017, the European Court of Human Rights found that the domestic court's decisions had been arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable. ECHR found the Russian courts' decisions violated articles 6 and 7 of the European Convention on Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights 2017).

Another feature of the reactionary policy was a change in the legal field. In July 2012, the law about NPO was adopted. It is known as the "foreign agents' law". In accordance with it, Russian NPO connected with political activities, which received funding from abroad, were supposed to register as "foreign agents." This significantly complicated the work of non-profit organizations involved in human rights activities (Sachnin, Alexey 2014:196-197).

The actions of the media also led to the weakening of the protest movements 2011-2013. The coverage of the opposition rallies on state channels and in newspapers was almost invisible on the general information background. For

example, a content analysis of the weekly “First Channel” news in December 2011 and February 2012 showed that the percentage of reports on protests and events, related to them, did not exceed one tenth (in relation to the total information level). The participants in these processes were dehumanized and opposed to the main part of the population, using the pronoun "they", to divide the society (Kalk, Anastasia 2012: 164-170).

The end of the protest movement of 2011-2013 was marked by the loss of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny during the Moscow mayoral election, which was held on September 8, 2013 (RIA 2013). The government defeated the opposition, intimidating it and making it impossible to participate in the political process of the country. After two years of fighting for fair elections, people did not get what they fought for. The country continued to be ruled by Vladimir Putin and United Russia. To sum up, this period remains one of the most important for the country. It united the opposition and the people, raised the level of the political activity among the civilians, pointed out the problems of the government and gave an impulse to the further economic and political development of the country.

4.2. Interaction between the social opposition and the government in 2014 – 2016.

During 2014-2016, the interaction between the opposition and the government was based on the wars in Ukraine and Syria.

This time has become difficult for the Russian non-systemic opposition. After the active unification of all groups of the non-systemic opposition in 2011-2013, came the time of the discord. Differences in assessments of the Russian foreign policy in 2014 have become one of the reasons for the deep split within the non-systemic opposition, between nationalists and liberals (Ponomarev, Mailis 2018:109).

The assassination of Boris Nemtsov, one of the main opposition leaders, on February 27, 2015 was significant for the non-systemic opposition in this period. It changed the key figures of the opposition on the political arena. So, after the death of Nemtsov, Alexei Navalny came forward, since then he has been a leading force and the headline of the Russian non-systemic opposition (Eliseeva 2016: 251-252).

The annexation of Crimea, or as it is called in Russia “the return of Crimea”, on March 2014, significantly increased Vladimir Putin's rating. From January to March 2014, Putin's rating increased by 15% - from 65% to 80% and continued to grow. In June 2014, it was 86%, according to the The Levada Center, a Russian independent, nongovernmental polling and sociological research organization (Vedomosti 2019).

This hindered the actions of the opposition. After all, now the opposition has lost a significant part of the support of the population, which approved Putin's foreign policy towards Ukraine. It also divided the opposition itself and led to the creation of coalitions (Ponomarev, Mailis 2018:121). Although the bulk of the opposition condemned Russia's intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, not all of the oppositionists insisted on its return to Ukraine (Ponomarev, Mailis 2018:109-120).

Almost all opposition leaders, except nationalists, agreed that an aggressive foreign policy towards Syria and Ukraine negatively influenced Russia's image, and harmed Russian economy. Oppositionists emphasized that the president was violating his obligations to the people. The costs of military operations and sanctions against the country did not give a chance for the development of Russian society. The fact that Putin involved Russia in these wars harmed the world community. It also had a destructive impact on Russian citizens, whose incomes suffered greatly after the imposition of sanctions (Ponomarev, Mailis 2018:109-120).

Dissatisfaction with active military policy raised a new wave of protest movements. An anti-war rally called the “March for Peace” was held on March 15, 2014. The key figures in this political event were opposition politicians Boris Nemtsov and Ilya Yashin. The protesters’ demands to Russian President Vladimir Putin were:

- The immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from territory of Crimea;
- The cessation of interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine;
- The strict fulfilling of international agreements (Skvortsov 2016: 164).

On September 21, 2014, another “March of Peace” was held. Its main goal was to make the government to fulfill the Minsk Protocols. Analyzing these two protest actions in 2014, the anti-presidential orientation of the protests seems very clear. Despite the fact that the events were registered as the “March of Peace”, the bulk of the slogans and posters were not anti-war, but contained criticism of Vladimir Putin specifically. This led to a fact that the main aim of the non-systemic opposition was not to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, but to resolve internal problems by dismissal of Vladimir Putin (Skvortsov 2016: 164-165).

The opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was assassinated, on February 27, 2015, on the eve of the opposition rally "Spring". A group of people was convicted of his murder; however, the Investigative Committee did not reveal who ordered the murder of Boris Nemtsov. The majority suppose that Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen Republic, one of the main supporters of the Putin regime, was involved in this. However, his participation in the assassination of Boris Nemcov is uncertain, the political component of this assassination is undeniable. (The New York Times 2017).

On March 1, 2015, instead of the opposition rally "Spring", a mourning demonstration was held. More than 50 thousand people came to express their deep condolences to Boris Nemtsov and demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the situation in the country (BBC News 2015).

A year later, on February 27, 2016, a mourning march commemorates the assassination of Boris Nemcov. The memory march became the first a big mass event of the opposition after the mourning march held on March 1, 2015. However, it did not receive wide political publicity. The reason for this was the reconsideration of actions of Boris Nemtsov as a politician as well as a low popularity rating among most of his allies, who, through mourning marches, tried to demonstrate the integrity and indivisibility of the opposition, despite the fact that its leaders had conflicts over a number of internal issues (BBC News 2016).

The problem of the leaders of the non-systemic opposition is the absence of features that characterize them outside of the anti-government discourse. This does not give them opportunity to be represented in independent and governmental media, where the audience is much bigger. This lowers the trust level of people towards the opposition. For the most people, they are simply invisible (Skvortsov 2016: 164-166).

Most protesters only show the disagreement with the authorities, but do not agitate for critical and radical actions to change the regime. Also, the opposition does not have a well-developed political program to change the situation in the country. This is the reason of the ineffectiveness of political protests of Russian non-systemic opposition (Skvortsov 2016: 164-166).

The formation process of the institution of the political opposition in Russia can be characterized as relatively stable. During the chronological framework of the "Post-Bolotnaya" period, there are no significant changes and transformations in oppositional protests, on the contrary, the format, number

of participants, organizers and leaders remain almost unchanged, which indicates stagnation in modern Russian non-systemic opposition.

4.3. Interaction between the social opposition and the government in 2017 – 2018.

Period 2017-2018 was very significant for the Russian non-systemic opposition. During this period, very important events took place. In 2017, anti-corruption protests against the Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev started across the country and even abroad. Moreover, the presidential race began in this period. It began a year before the elections, which were supposed to be held on March 2018. This was the first time in the history of modern Russia, when the leader of a non-systemic opposition announced long time before its intention to participate in presidential race. This person was Alexei Navalny.

Back in 2011, Alexei Navalny founded the NPO Anti-Corruption Foundation (Russian: Фонд Борьбы с Коррупцией, Fond Borby s Korruptsiyey - FBK) (FBK "About us"). Its main goal is to investigate and to expose corruption cases among the high-ranking Russian government officials. By 2017, Alexei Navalny and FBK have reached the peak of their activity. On March 2, 2017 they released a documentary film Don't call him "Dimon" (Russian: Он вам не Димон, On vam ne Dimon) about the corruption of the Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev.

The documentary film tells about the alleged property of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. The film claims that Medvedev is a part of a multi-level corruption scheme. Thus, according to the authors, through charity organizations legally registered on Medvedev's trustees, including relatives and classmates, he owns expensive real estate (Youtube "On vam ne Dimon" 2017).

The founder of FBK Alexei Navalny acted as a storyteller in the film. After the release of the film, FBK sent a request to the Investigative Committee to

open criminal cases of a bribe against a Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and a billionaire Alisher Usmanov (Meduza 2017).

However, the Investigative Committee did not conduct investigations. Then Alexei Navalny accused Russian authorities of not having a proper reaction to the investigation. He summoned people for rallies throughout the whole country to demand the authorities to answer their questions about the corruption (Gazeta.ru 2017).

On March 26, 2017 in 99 cities of Russia and abroad (Prague, London, Basel and Bonn) were held rallies against the corruption. Local authorities began to refuse to hold rallies for various, mostly ridiculous, reasons. In Moscow, an application was filed for a rally on Tverskaya Street. However, the mayor's office refused the application, but did not provide the protesters with an alternative place within the deadlines established by law. In this case, the rally was automatically considered as a consolidated (Navalny2018, official web-page 2017).

According to the organizers, from 20,000 to 30,000 people attended the rally in Moscow. Throughout the whole county, there were around 150 thousand of protesters (Navalny2018, official web-page 2017). Alexei Navalny also went to the rally, but did not manage to get far. He was detained within 5 minutes and taken to the police department, where he spent the night. The next day, the court accused him of disobedience to the police and assigned him 15 days of administrative arrest (Interfax 2017). More than 1000 people were detained at a rally in Moscow - this was an absolute record for one day. (OVD-Info 2017).

According to a number of foreign and Russian media and the European Parliament, these were the largest protests in Russia since the protests of 2011-2013, with a large number of detainees, whom the ECHR demanded to release immediately (The New York Times 2017), (RBC 2017).

The result of these protests was a decrease in the trust level of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev (RBC 2017). Moreover, the number of people interested in politics has been increased, especially among the young population of the country. The opposition started to use a familiar language to young people, with the help of various social media. To some extent, Navalny can be called a popularizer of the protest activity (Volkov, Denis 2017).

It is worth to mention that the anti-corruption rally in March 2017 and further rallies in June and October of the same year were the part of the presidential political campaign of Alexei Navalny. At the end of 2016, he announced his entry into the presidential race (Kommersant 2016). The political campaign faced a number of difficulties and obstacles. Every fifth day of his presidential campaign (60 days) Navalny spent in custody (DW.com 2018). The campaign lasted 460 days, during which 81 headquarters were opened throughout the country. Unfortunately, the campaign was unsuccessful. On December 25, 2017, the Central Election Commission denied a registration of Alexei Navalny as a candidate to the future elections due to his previous criminal records. Despite the fact that the Constitution of the Russian Federation restricts suffrage to only two groups of citizens: the legally incompetent and imprisoned people (Navalny2018, official web-page 2018).

Shortly before this, Ksenia Sobchak, a journalist, a TV anchor, a public figure, joined the presidential race. This was her debut in the world of big politics. Before that, she was only a member of the Coordination Council of the Russian opposition in 2012-2013. Sobchak from the beginning of her campaign possessed herself as the "candidate against all" (Vedomosti 2017). In an interview on an independent channel Dozhd' (Rain), Sobchak announced that she will withdraw her candidacy, if Alexei Navalny would be registered as a candidate on future elections (Dozhd' 2017).

There were other opposition candidates like Yavlinsky and Titov, but their ratings were not high, and the presidential campaign was practically absent (Machora 2018: 111).

The fact that Putin will run for the elections became publicly known only on December 6, 2017, just a couple of months before the elections. He, as in previous times, did not participate in debates and did not travel around the country with the election campaign, as did Navalny and Sobchak. Putin's ratings were as high as never. So, Putin's rating before the election in 2012 was 49%. In 2017, his rating did not fall below 62% (Machora 2018: 112).

Expectedly, Putin won the election and became a president for the fourth time. He got 76, 69% the absolute maximum of votes throughout the Russian history. The opposition again failed to achieve the real power (RBC 2018).

5. Political discourse between the social opposition and the government.

This part is based on the analysis of interaction between the social opposition and the government in 2011-2018 accomplished in a previous chapter. In this chapter, I will analyze the political discourse between the social opposition and the government. Chapter will consist of three sub-chapters: political discourse in 2011-2013, in 2014-2016, and in 2017-2018.

5.1. Political discourse in 2011-2013

Writing about this period, the discourse will be focused on slogans and speeches of the governmental and oppositional leaders, used during the protests.

On September 2011, President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced that they are ready to swap their places during the congress of United Russia. After Medvedev's four-year presidential term, Vladimir Putin decided to go on his third presidential term. Thus, Medvedev said: "I believe that it would be right for the congress to support the candidacy of Vladimir Putin for the presidency" (Svoboda 2016).

The cynically declared castling outraged a significant part of Russian society. This outrage predetermined the surge in the protest movement, which began immediately after the parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011. Thus, the refrain of the protests during this period was "Putin go away", "We need fair elections" (Gazeta.ru 2012).

On the first rally "For fair elections" on Bolotnaya Square on December 4, 2011, its organizer Vladimir Ryzhkov started his speech with words: "Not a single vote for Putin, we demand fair elections". He continued with demands: "Immediate release of all political prisoners, cancellation of the results of elections to the State Duma, Churov's resignation, investigation of his

activities, as well as falsifications, punishment of the guilty, an adoption of the democratic election law no later than this spring, registration of independent parties, holding early fair elections to parliament”. The discourse of this rally was strongly anti-Putting with the slogan “Russia without Putin” (Gazeta.ru 2012). Opposition accuses authorities of the election fraud and stealing their votes. People did not want to see Putin as a president for the next six years.

At the same day, another rally was held. It was pro-governmental “Anti-Orange” rally on Poklonnaya Hill. Its discourse was pro-Putin. “We have what to lose”, “Vote for Putin”, “Putin is our President” the slogans were. The host of the rally, journalist Maxim Shevchenko, shouted from the stage: “Many people write that they forced you here. This is slander! Free people gathered here! Yes? Tell me, huh? ” (Gazeta.ru 2012).

As I wrote in previous chapter, many people came to the rally under the pressure, some of them have been paid for the participation. So, the opinions of the participants differed. People were not embarrassed to admit that they were forced to take part in the rally for Putin, but they refused to give their names. Some of them were disappointed with the situation. One man told the reporter: “We were all brought here. I work in Bryansk, in the housing and communal services system. I’m an engineer, I’m against Putin and I know that the elections are falsified” (Gazeta.ru 2012). Another agreed to be on the rally even though they were asked to come. “I do not see anything wrong with the fact that we were imperatively asked to come here. I work in a prefecture in the Central District, we have a career and good conditions. I don’t want to lose this job - and now, I’m here voluntarily” – told another man (Gazeta.ru 2012).

All the rallies in winter of 2011-2012 were consolidated, so, they did not lead to the detentions, and the authorities' reaction to the opposition rallies was

lazy and dismissive. They did not see any threat in rallies. Putin commented the protest rallies in a derogative manner. "Frankly speaking, it's obscene, but nevertheless: I thought it was kind of a propaganda for the fight against AIDS, that it's like contraceptives", that how he commented the protest symbol - a White Ribbon. This rude comparison was used to discredit the symbol of the protest. He also called the protesters "Bandar-logs", fictional monkey people from The Jungle Book by English writer Rudyard Kipling (BBC 2016). Kipling writes about the Bandar-Log: "They were always just going to have a leader and laws and customs of their own, but they never did, because their memories would not hold over from day to day, and so they settled things by making up a saying: "What the Bandar-log think now the Jungle will think later". So, this comparison was chosen by Putin in order to dehumanize and humiliate the intentions of protesters. He literally compared the protesters with monkeys and told that they are purblind.

During the "March of Millions", the largest rally of 2012, not a single speech was made by the opposition. The rally was brutally dismissed, and opposition leaders were detained. This event became resonant and was actively covered in the independent media. However, the government and the state media were silent.

The participants of this demonstration were convinced that the Russian authorities did not know how to stop the constant mass rallies. "Despite the fact that the elections were held, the number of people at the rallies was decreased slightly. The authorities were afraid that the political protest would sooner or later unite with the economic and social protests and this would be a complete disaster for them," said Alexei Gaskarov, a public figure, who convicted of "Bolotnaya Square case" (DW. 2017).

He is sure that a power scenario was chosen precisely to suppress the rally activity, and a "Bolotnaya Square case" was created: "That's why so different

people ended up in the court. They wanted to intimidate and show that no matter who you are, you can still be under investigation” (DW. 2017). The citation narratives emphasizes the mood of the protesters. In the beginning of rallies, people were full of hope and were ready to change the situation. However, now people were afraid to do and say something, they did not want to lose what they have and spend years in jail.

A year later, in 2013, the “March of Millions” again was held in support of the detainees on Bolotnaya Square. Where the main slogans were "Freedom to political prisoners". Then Putin first Time gave comments about the "Bolotnaya Square case". "We all must learn, how to live according to the law and understand that if someone is allowed to break the law, we may face with the problems that we had in 1917", the president said (RIA 2013). It should be noted that the bloody revolution of 1917 is often an argument against demonstrations and protests in the political discourse of modern Russia. Putin wanted to show the illegality of the protest, that why he compared it with the revolution.

To sum up, it is possible to say that the political discourse at that time was rather one-sided. The opposition had many demands and went to the streets of the cities with various slogans. In response to this, the authorities physically suppressed the protests and practically did not comment the situation. It was a kind of crossroad. The government could support the progressive part of society, start reforms, and launch liberalization and economic growth. Unfortunately, the authorities chose to maintain power, crush the dissents, forced them to escape abroad, and so on.

5.2. Political discourse in 2014-2016

The political discourse of this period was mainly built around two wars in which Russia was directly involved. These are wars in Ukraine and in Syria. The status of Crimea was also a question. Accordingly, the political discourse

between the opposition and the government was based on these events. The assassination of Boris Nemtsov, one of the main opposition leaders, on February 27, 2015, was another significant point in political discourse of this period.

The opinions about all these issues divided the opposition. Thus Alexei Navalny's phrase that Crimea is "not a sandwich to give it back and forth", turned out for the oppositionist in a loss of the support of many of his ideological liberal supporters (BBC 2014). In this sentence the discourse is marked by a figurative narration. Navalny added: "Crimea belongs to those people who live in Crimea," and that the peninsula "was captured with a flagrant violation of all international norms, but now it is part of Russia, even though it brought a large damage to the country" (BBC 2014).

Navalny's position regarding the Ukrainian crisis was differentiated. He did not want to limit the number of existing and potential supporters. On the one hand, Navalny insists on the need to implement the Minsk agreements (according to him, the Kremlin sabotages this process). On the other hand, the politician does not insist on the need to transfer Crimea to Ukraine (Svoboda 2017).

The opposition politician Ilya Yashin was very critical to the Kremlin's foreign policy. According to him, the tragic events in Ukraine are, on the one hand, the result of V.V. Putin "to find and strengthen his place in the world by challenging and conflicting with the United States". On the other hand, the consequence of the authorities' plans to stop the growth of internal discontent with the help of the "small victorious war" (Svoboda 2015).

The head of the opposition party "Yabloko" G.A. Yavlinsky stated that Russia's foreign policy, destructs state's economic potential. He regarded the reunification of Crimea with Russia as an annexation, and the Kremlin's accompanying actions as "stirring up a war". He believed that in the future

on the peninsula should be held a legitimate referendum about its territory as part of Ukraine, Russia or an independent state (Yavlinsky, Grigoriy 2016).

However, there are other opinions among the non-systemic opposition. A member of the Party of Business, Maxim Kalashnikov believed that Russia should annex the territory of unrecognized republics (Donbass and Lugansk), thereby increasing the country's population by the expense of native speakers of the Russian language and culture. So, he implies the nationalistic discourse in his speech. He certainly supported the reunification of Crimea with Russia. He considered the outcome of the events of Euromaidan as an anti-Russian coup, carried out with the support of radical Ukrainian nationalists, and the Poroshenko's regime as a "Russophobe" (Kalashnikov, Maxim 2017). In addition, National Patriots considered the reunification of Crimea with Russia as an act of "historical justice" (Ponomarev, Mailis 2018:121).

About the participation in Syrian war, all opposition ladders had the same opinion. They consider it as useless and harmful.

According to Leonid Volkov, an employee of FBK and Navalny's right-hand, the Conflict in Syria is used by the Kremlin as, on the one hand, the main resource to keep the current government rating at a high level, and on the other hand, as a potential subject of a deal with the United States regarding the cancellation sanctions. At the same time, the politician says that the conflict is not directly connected with the national interests of Russia (Svoboda 2016).

According to the political emigrant Chichvarkin, the cost of conducting military operations in Syria is "excessive and unreasonable", especially in a contemporary economic situation in the Russian Federation. In addition, direct intervention in the conflict, according to the opposition, increased the risk of terrorist attacks in Russia. In general, according to Chichvarkin,

Russia's foreign policy “will certainly lead the country to economic collapse by 2018-2019” (Chichvarkin, Yevgenij 2015).

According to Grigoriy Yavlinsky, the presence of Russian troops in Syria is associated exclusively with the desire of Vladimir Putin to keep Assad’s regime. The politician claimed that the Russian leader considered the Syrian regime familiar to Russian and believed that its liquidation could led to the end of the Russian authoritarian model (Yavlinsky, Grigoriy 2016).

The position of the government regarding the war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea has always been uniquely positive. Addressing the people of Ukraine, Putin said that Russia does not want to harm them by any means or insult their national feelings. In his speech, he told: “We always respected the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state, unlike, those who sacrificed the unity of Ukraine in order to their political ambitions [...] Today's civil confrontation is entirely on their conscience [...] We do not want to divide Ukraine, we do not need this. As for the Crimea, it was and will remains to Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar [...] But it will never belong to western separatists!” He also reminded that, in his opinion, the Russians and Ukrainians are not just close neighbors, but “in fact, we are one nation [...] Ancient Russia is our common source, we still cannot live without each other” (Kremlin 2014). In his speech, he used bittersweet narration and condolences to Ukrainian people; however, this speech sounds more like a mockery.

Another issue of the political discourse in this period was around the assassination of Boris Nemcov, which happened on February 27, 2015. It was the most resonant political murder since the murder of Anna Politkovskaya. There is still debate about what causes his assassination and who committed it.

Thus, Navalny on his official web-page wrote: “Nemtsov was killed by members of the government or pro-government organization on the orders of the country's political leadership, including Vladimir Putin. The only question is how this order was formulated: you must kill Nemtsov or you must conduct a loud resonant action” (Navalny 2015).

Immediately after his death, people came to a mourning demonstration. The slogans of this march were “Heroes do not die”, “Russia will be free” “I am Boris, government, shoot me”; “These bullets are in each of us”, “Boris” (the verb boris’ means to “fight” in Russian language, which sounds very similar to the name of Nemcov, which is Boris) (BBC News 2015).

Putin commented the death of Boris Nemtsov too: “We must finally rid Russia of shame and tragedies like the one we recently experienced and saw. I mean the impudent murder of Boris Nemtsov right in the center of the capital.” However, he did not express condolences to the family of the deceased. The head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, accused the assassination of "special services of the West, seeking by any means to cause internal conflict in Russia” (The Village 2015). In his speech the discourse was strongly connected with the state’s idea of “foreign enemy”.

An interesting fact that the people, who were convicted for the murder of Boris Nemcov, were from Chechnya. In the court they looked happy, as people, who are proud of what they did. You can find the pictures of them in the Appendix A of this work.

5.3. Political discourse in 2017-2018

In this period, the political discourse was based on the anti-corruption protests against the Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in 2017 and the presidential campaign of the future elections in 2018.

Starting point for anti-corruption protests in 2017 was a documentary film “Don't call him Dimon” (Russian: “Он вам не Димон”, “On vam ne Dimon”) made by Alexei Navalny and his organization FBK (“Dimon” is a vulgar form of the name Dmitry). I wrote about the plot of this film in a previous chapter. In this chapter, I would like to analyze the political discourse, based on this film.

In this film, Navalny reveals the corruption scheme of Medvedev, and also calls him "a crook and a thief. “In addition, he often uses this expression in relation to the entire government elite. The United Russia in his speeches mostly called the party of “crooks and thieves“ (Alexei Navalny 2017). The phrase “crooks and thieves“ was used to express his negative attitude towards the authorities.

A few days later, Dmitry Medvedev reacted on this matter. During the meeting with factory workers, one of them asked: “Dmitry Anatolyevich, we are watching you on TV: you have very hard job, difficult, many meetings and trips. And at the same time, we still see on TV that there are some attacks on you, on the Government. I would like to know your opinion: who benefits from this? And how do you personally react to this?” In his reply, Medvedev called the FBK investigation “muddy and nonsense”, compiled “on the principle of compote” (Russian government’s official web-page 2017). This dialogue perfectly shows the sublime attitude of ordinary workers to the Prime Minister and Medvedev's complete confidence in his innocence and neglect of the opposition.

No one else from the state elite commented on this investigation, that led to numerous anti-corruption rallies throughout the county. The slogans of these rallies were: “We need answers”, “Medvedev must resign”, “Dimon, sell cottages, build roads”, “Medvedev is a thief” (DW 2017).

After the rallies one of the users of social network Instagram wrote: “Dmitry Anatolyevich, really, answer - aren't you ashamed? Can it really be not a shame? It just does not fit in my head. How do you sleep at night?” He got a response from the official Instagram page of the Prime Minister. “Not bad, I went skiing”, the Prime Minister wrote, accompanying the answer with a cheerful emoji (Znak.com 2017). Here Medvedev once again shows his complete feeling of innocence and inaccessibility. He shows the disregard to the protests and questions of the citizens.

The government’s reaction to anti-corruption rallies, as expected, was strongly negative. “I personally advocate that the fight against the corruption should be constantly in the center of public attention, and I always positively perceive people's attention to these problems”, Putin said at the Arctic Forum. “The only thing that I think is wrong: if someone, some political forces, try to use this tool in their own selfish interests, not to improve the situation in the country, but to self-promote on the political arena in anticipation of some political events, including the election campaigns within the country”, the President added. Moreover, Vladimir Putin compared the rallies to the Arab Spring and the revolution in Ukraine, appealing to the negative, in his opinion, results of these events. (Interfax 2017). Putin is trying to challenge the real motives of the protests by denying the corruption motive. Instead, he is trying to discredit opposition leaders in the eyes of the public, emphasizing the political ambitions of some protest leaders.

There is a prejudice in modern Russian society against revolutionary activity, based on the bloody revolution of 1917. Based on this, a political discourse condemning any revolutions and coups has been built. After the coup in Ukraine authorities, in their speeches, often appealed to this in a negative tone. So, the question "Do you want to live like in Ukraine?" constantly sounded in the speeches of the President in a derogatory context. When he is

appealing to the situation in Ukraine, he tries to scare people to go on protests, remembering, that it can lead to the revolution.

Another point of the political discourse was the presidential elections, which should be held on March 18, 2018.

On December 13, 2016 Alexei Navalny posted a video on his official Youtube channel, where he told that he will run for the presidency. In this video, he stressed that he decided to take part in the elections, first of all, to “make Russia better”. He continued: “Real elections are not only one man’s victory. This is a clash of ideas, competition of programs; this is the choice of the path along which the country will develop.” He said: “the Kremlin and the government’s only concern is resolving their personal monetary issues” and “do not allow competition even in the elections, where it should be”. He finished his speech with the encouraging words: “On this election, I want to become your vote. With the voice of those tens of millions of people who honestly work, raise children, pay taxes, love their country. However, the authorities don’t hear their voices, they ignore them, they rob them, they deprive them of the worthy life that they deserve. It will be a difficult way, but I am sure that we will succeed. After all, the truth is on our side” (Alexei Navalny 2016).

The Kremlin reacted dryly to Navalny’s decision to run for the presidency. Presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov answered the journalist’s question about the situation with no reaction. To show, that the government do not take it seriously (Novaya Gazeta 2016).

The only candidate who was able to communicate with the current President was Ksenia Sobchak. Sobchak accredited to the press conference as a correspondent for the Dozhd TV channel, because, in her words, “this is the only way” to ask the president a question, since he “is not participating in the debate”. On the official press conference Sobchak asked Putin about Navalny:

“There is such a candidate - Alexey Navalny. There are false allegations against him. He proved his innocence in the European Court of Human Rights. Nevertheless, he is not allowed to take part in the elections. The same applies to my work. I am denied to rent the premises for campaigning. To be an oppositionist means that you will be either killed or imprisoned. Why is this happening? Is the government afraid of fair competition?” (Kommersant 2017).

Putin answered to the question of Sobchak, although, the president traditionally did not name Aleksey Navalny by his name. He said: “About the character you mentioned. Do you want dozens of Poro... (suggesting the name of Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine) running around, excuse me, Saakashvili? The one you named is Saakashvili, only in the Russian edition! Do you want us to live from one maidan (referred to Maidan Nezalezhnosti, literally "Independence Square") to another? We have all gone through this before, when the state turns into a muddy puddle, where the oligarchs “catch a goldfish” for themselves. Like it was in the 1990s, and so now in Ukraine! I am sure that the majority of Russian citizens do not want this, and we will not allow this to happen”. He assured that "the government was not afraid of anyone and is not afraid now" (Kommersant 2017).

The political discourse of Putin mainly build on the fact, that stability is the most important thing for the state. He claims, that now Russia is more stable than ever before and compare the current situation in Ukraine with the unstable situation in Russia in 1990s. Memories about 90s with its poverty and uncertain future is still very fresh in minds of Russian citizens. And they are affraid of the repeating of this scenario. That is why Putin appealed to this period in his speach. Also, as usual, he talked about Ukraine and connected it with the 90s in Russia. It was made to stress how dangerous is Navalny for the society. Moreover, the fact, that Putin never calls Navalny by his name, is

very peculiar. Depriving Navalny of his name, he dehumanized him, tried to make him unattractive for the society.

On December 6, 2018, at the concert dedicated to the 85th anniversary of the Gorky Automobile Plant, Putin announced his intention to run for the presidency for the fourth term. During the event, one of the plant's employees recalled the words said by the president earlier on Wednesday that Putin would run for president if supported by the people. "So, today, without exception, everyone in this hall supports you. Vladimir Vladimirovich, give us a present, announce your decision, because we are all for you", the employee said. Then Putin replied: "I will run for president of the Russian Federation". According to the head of state, "there is probably no better place and better reason for announcing this" (Interfax 2017).

His late announcement and absence of the political campaign shows his confidence in winning the elections.

After winning the elections, Putin addressed to the people on the main channel of the country. In his address to the people, also published on the Kremlin's official website, Putin said that he promised people to solve existing problems. However, he noted that it would be "absolutely irresponsible to promise to do all this immediately, right now, to change everything overnight". He, also, mentioned: "Criticism, debate, discussions are necessary, but there should be no place for irresponsible populism. Service to the national interests and prosperity of people should be the main guideline for our work, especially today. This is the basis for our consolidation and collaboration" (Kremlin 2018). The defining feature of the president speech is the lack of concrete information, feeling of superiority and patronizing.

5.4. Comparison of political discourse from 2011 to 2018

In 2011-2013, the political discourse was based on protests caused by the falsified elections to the State Duma and then to the falsified presidential elections. In the beginning of this period, the government allowed all these protest, because it did not think that the protests could lead to some changes. The government just allowed people to express their opinion. After the presidential elections the authorities understood, that the protest movement would not stop and then they used the force to stop it. The authorities did not comment rallies, they did not have a dialog with the opposition, they just used the power, and it was the strategy.

In 2014-2016, the political discourse was based on the Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine and Syria. The opposition leaders criticized the government for its decisions, and again they were not heard. The discourse occurred, as if it was on different radio waves, where one side does not hear the other. Both sides talked a lot about Ukraine and Syria in their public interviews, but they never replied to questions of each other. The government did not consider it necessary to comment the activity and opinions of the opposition; it was following its political course. In addition, all press conferences were strictly moderated; traditionally, opposition leaders were not allowed to attend them, which complicated the implementation of direct dialogue.

In 2017-2018, the political discourse was based on the corruption in the country and future presidential elections. This period was more active in interaction between the government and the opposition. Alexei Navalny was able to break through the silence and drew the attention of not only the public, but also the authorities, in the person of Medvedev and Putin. However, even then authorities were stingy with their comments.

6. Conclusion

The main goal of this thesis was to analyze the political discourse between the social opposition and the government in Russia in three different periods from 2011 to 2013, from 2014 to 2016 and from 2017 to 2018 to answer the thesis question: “How the political discourse between the social opposition and the government in Russia has been changed from 2011 until 2018?”

Since 2011, the opposition has tried to achieve changes in the existing regime, but from year to year has failed in achieving their goals. Tools and strategies of impact on the political processes in the country by the opposition remained unchanged. The protest movements took place according to the same patterns and did not involve many people. Approximately 20-30 thousand people participated in rallies in Moscow; this is nothing for the multi-million capital. Moreover, each time there were more and more detainees. Ultimately, people were simply afraid to lose everything by going to a rally or actively defending their political position on the Internet, because they could get a prison term for this.

Opposition leaders could not break into state channels, whose audience is many times larger than in independent or liberal media. Accordingly, they could not convey their position to millions of ordinary citizens. They remained unheard and invisible. The state propaganda has remained strong.

The involvement of youth into the political life of the country could be considered as a success of the opposition. However, this is the only one aspect of their actions, which led to a success. The creation of a young passionate, politically active part of the population may turn out to be a success for the opposition in the future, but it will take time.

Answering the question: «how the political discourse between the social opposition and the government in Russia has been changed from 2011 till 2018?» – I can say that there were not many significant changes. The main

language of the government is power, not the dialogue. That why it is difficult to talk about changes in the political discourse. The government stays silent to the questions and demands of the opposition. All comments towards the opposition leaders and opposition activity are rude, discredit and sometimes sounds lenient. The government feels its complete inaccessibility sitting in its high castle. That why its reaction on all of these events is meagre.

The only thing that can lead Russia to democratization is the creation of a dialogue between the social opposition and the government to solve problems in the country. Unfortunately, at this stage it seems impossible.

7. List of abbreviations

ECHR - European Court of Human Rights

FBK - Anti-Corruption Foundation (Russian: Фонд Борьбы с Коррупцией,
Fond Borby s Korruptsiyey)

MPD – Moscow police department

NPO – nonprofit organization

TV – Television

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9. Appendix A

Pictures of the protest on Bolotnaya Square on May 6, 2013.



Photo: Sergey Ponomarev / AP



Photo: Sergey Fadeichev / TASS



Photo: Tatyana Makeeva / Reuters



Photo: Michael Metzel / AP



Photo: Mikhail Voskresensky / Reuters



Photo: Denis Sinyakov / Reuters

Pictures from the mourning march caused by the assassination of Boris Nemcov on March 1, 2015.



“Heroes do not die”

Photo: TASS



Photo: Mitya Aleshkovsky for RBC

Convicted murders of Boris Nemcov



Photo: REUTERS



Photo: REUTERS

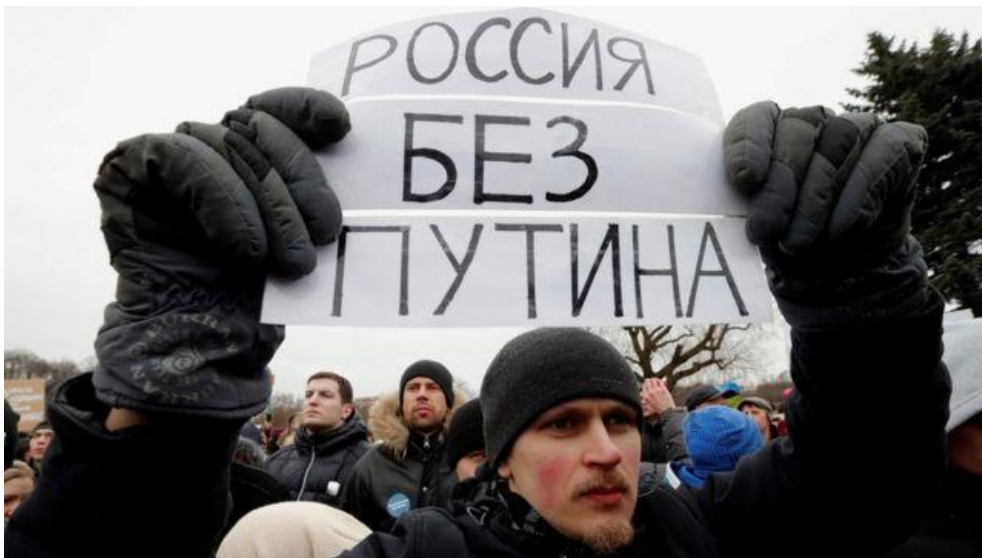
The detention of Alexei Navalny



Photo: Mikhail Pochuev / TASS

Pictures from the anti-corruption protest on March 27, 2017





"Russia without Putin"