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Lukas Latz

Repressing Environmental Activism in  
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Redaktion: Julia Glathe

[julia.glathe@fu-berlin.de](mailto:julia.glathe@fu-berlin.de)

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# **Repressing Environmental Activism in Contemporary Russia: A Field Study in Chelyabinsk**

## **Informationen zum Autor:**

Lukas Latz  
Master Osteuropastudien, Schwerpunkt Soziologie  
[lukas.latz@posteo.de](mailto:lukas.latz@posteo.de)

## **Zusammenfassung:**

Diese Studie rekonstruiert sieben Jahre (2012-2019) in der Geschichte einer sozialen Bewegung, die gegen eine geplante Kupfermine und Verarbeitungsanlage am Rande der Südrural-Stadt Tscheljabinsk kämpft, und zeigt die Allgegenwart von Repressionen in politischen Konflikten in Russland auf. Repressionen werden durch eine enge Partnerschaft zwischen staatlichen Akteuren und wirtschaftlichen Eliten ermöglicht und sind weitgehend effizient. Die Studie analysiert die historischen Ursprünge der gegen soziale Bewegungen angewandten Repressionspolitik und identifiziert die wichtigsten in den Besonderheiten des privaten Sicherheitssektors, die sich aus der wirtschaftlichen Liberalisierung in den 90er Jahren und der zunehmend zentralisierten und autoritären Herrschaft unter Präsident Wladimir Putin ergeben haben. Ökologische Konflikte sind ein Indikator für Zentrum-Peripherie-Konflikte im heutigen Russland und legen damit eine große Schwäche der gegenwärtigen Staatsarchitektur offen.

## **Abstract:**

Reconstructing seven years (2012-2019) in the history of a social movement fighting against a proposed copper mine and processing plant in the outskirts of the Southern Ural City Chelyabinsk, this study exposes the ubiquity of repressions in political conflicts in Russia. Repressions are made possible and widely efficient due to a close partnership between state actors and economic elites. The study analyses the historic origins of the repressive policies applied against social movements and identifies the most important ones in the specifics of the private security sector emerging from the economic liberalization in 90s and in the increasingly centralist and authoritarian rule under President Vladimir Putin. Ecological conflicts are an indicator for centre-periphery conflicts in contemporary Russia and thus expose a major weakness of the current state architecture.

## **Keywords:**

Repression, dictatorship, social movements, environment, copper, Russia, Chelyabinsk

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## 1 Introduction

Despite its striking political relevance, there is little sociological research on ecological conflicts in Russia (Braden 2014, Turovets 2014; Henry 2017; Kolotov et al. 2017; Blokov 2018; Henry et al. 2019). Russia's economy is widely based on exporting raw materials. The country is a major provider of oil, gas and different kinds of metals for the world economy. On a global scale, the country's forests and permafrost territories play a crucial role in the effort to combat global warming. Moreover, Russia has to deal with a disastrous heritage of nuclear armament. These issues indicate that it is worthy to take a closer look on how environmental discourse and conflicts play out in Russia. By conflict I understand „a social relation between at least two actors whose differing needs, interests or goals result into some kind of action” (Brunner et al. 2019: 12).

In recent history, ecological conflicts threatened Russia's ruling elite again and again. The nuclear event in Chernobyl 1986 served as an eye-opener to Mikhail Gorbachev. Himself responsible for the initial downplaying of the catastrophe, he regularly lamented the outcomes of the Soviet economy and social policy in the wake of the events. The catastrophe was a sign of upcoming trouble and thus increased his eagerness to pass reforms (Taubman 2017: 242). Gorbachev was not alone with that. We have many testimonies of people losing faith in the Communist Party in the wake of Chernobyl (see for instance Alekseevich 2017: 148-162).

Russia's political opposition has also recognized how many questions of power and social justice are inherent to ecological issues. Before the Olympic Games in Sochi 2014, the organisation Eco-Guard in Northern Caucasus [ekovakhta na severnom kavkase] exposed the abundant size and luxury of certain dachas in Russia's European South owned by high-ranking officials. Among the exposed objects were also villas owned by Prime minister Dimitry Medvedev. Eco Guard's protest actions remind of Alexey Navalnyy's investigations of corruption and opulent wealth in Russia's political elite (Davydova & Prikhod'ko 2019). This serves as an example of how ecological protest can aim right at the centre of the ruling elite's vulnerability: by raising allegations of corruption and abuse of power.

Moreover, ecological conflicts become increasingly relevant in Russian contemporary politics for two important reasons:

- 1) They expose centre-periphery conflicts. Ecological problems mostly emerge as local problems and often in the Russian periphery – in times when the Russian provinces become less distanced from Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In the Soviet era, it was still very difficult to grasp information on events occurring in Russian provinces. This is highly relevant for the country's environmental history: In 1957, a major nuclear event afflicted the Ural region.

This catastrophe shook people's everyday life. Food shortages occurred and hospitals were quickly crowded with people suffering from radiation. All this happened in an industrial region and densely populated area. Nevertheless, verified evidence and testimonies about the event could only be delivered to a larger audience as late as in the 1970s, thanks to an exiled Soviet dissident's research reminding of patient detective work. Today, thanks to modern information technology, it has become much easier to detect information and collect testimony from places located several time zones away from Moscow. Thus, newly emerging ecological movements in Russia indicate how people from the provinces are increasingly capable of raising their voices on a national level. As people become more and more connected, they are – in theory – more capable to take part in political decision-making. This development contrasts with the Russian state's highly centralist power architecture. Merely on paper, the state is a federal republic (Gel'man 2006). Whether vital problems on a local level are solved or not, often depends on decisions made in Moscow, be it in the parliament, in the Government or in the presidential administration. Environmental problems expose the state's power architecture as hyperbolically centralist; they put into question the righteousness and the efficiency of this centralist rule.

2) Technological developments shift the nature of ecological protest and social movements in Russia. Effective and long-lasting ecological movements mainly emerge in democracies. This might be conditioned by public access to information. In their first effort to tackle climate change in the 1980s, American environmentalists strongly relied on scientific evidence gathered by state authorities, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, security services and the NASA. The officials working for those state-funded research programs were allowed to share their information publicly, to speak up about it in open congress hearings and in the media (Rich 2018). In Russia however, access to data of the state's ecological monitoring programs is often restricted, distrusted or the state does not even bother to collect valuable data. Therefore, citizens have a difficult position in ecological conflicts. Citizens of industrial cities see and feel that the air is highly polluted. However, if the government does not share the actual pollution data, they have a hard time fighting for less pollution. If an authoritarian government simply denies the problem of pollution, it is difficult for environmental activists to even formulate a goal. Yet repressing pure information on environmental issues becomes more difficult. Technology allowing to monitor air quality is getting cheaper. As it becomes more affordable, citizens depend less and less on official data. Since 2017, there is a network of local grassroots groups monitoring air pollution in their respective home towns: "Russia, Breathe!" [Rossiya, dyshij!]. In the future, this decreasing need to rely on public data could lead to a major boost of ecological activism in

authoritarian states. An increasing amount of relevant information on the state of Russia's ecology also comes from abroad – thanks to satellite data on deforestation or on air pollution (Sizer et al. 2015; McLinden et al 2016; Ruiz 2020).

Even though social scientists have so far mostly ignored ecological conflicts in Russia, they reveal a lot about the country's political system. The following study is an explorative approach to those revelations. The study analyzes the evolution of the social movement StopGOK in the Southern Ural city Chelyabinsk. Experts consider it as the strongest environmental social movement in recent Russian history<sup>1</sup>, social movement understood as “informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest” (della Porta et al. 1999: 16).

In 2012, the movement StopGOK appeared as a gathering of citizens in opposition to a planned copper mine in the outskirts of Chelyabinsk. In the city, plenty of metal factories already contribute to air pollution, health hazards and water shortage. Thus, environmentalists fear the copper mine will make life in Chelyabinsk impossible. I will draw the history of the political conflict that evolved around the copper mine. I am going to show how state institutions and economic elites closely work together in order to undermine debates and ecological activism. After discussing this study's conceptual framework and methodology in chapter 2 and giving some historic and political context to the Ural region in chapter 3, the study recounts the events and developments in the fight for and against the copper mine. Then the study exposes and analyses the most important observable methods applied in order to repress environmental activism. The chapters 4 and 5 each expose several methods of repression. Chapter 4 opens with an account of rather soft and unperceived methods of channeling dissent: the suppression of information, the control of local media, and the restriction of public spaces. Chapter 5 analyses outright violent forms of repression. As a result, a detailed picture should emerge relating to how elites create ignorance, foster indifference and spread fear among citizens.

By this, as I will try to argue, state institutions and economic elites mainly contribute to the relative weakness of ecological activism in Russia. In the past, different arguments have been put forward to explain the weakness of civic activism in post-Soviet countries. One common explanation refers to cultural legacies. The experience of living in Soviet-style state socialism supposedly makes people lose trust to civic activism (Howard 2003). There are references to the lacking prospects of civil society organisations that are created “from above“, i.e. by Western funds (Howard 2003: 52). As far as environmental questions are

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<sup>1</sup> On the 25th of November, Ivan Blokov, research director of Greenpeace Russia, said so during a conference at Heinrich Boell foundation in Berlin.



concerned, scholars also refer to the soviet cultural history that promoted a cult of big-scale industrial production and evolved an “anti-ecological bias” (Yanitsky 1999). However, as I will argue, repressive policy implemented by an authoritarian regime that willingly destabilises environmental movements has a much higher impact on environmental movement’s relative weakness than it is mostly given credit to.

## **2 Conceptual framework and research design**

### **2.1 State of the art and research theses**

There is a common theme in sociological literature on Russian social movements and in the literature on authoritarian regimes: both tend to underestimate the importance of state repressions.

#### **2.1.1 The relevance of repression in the research on Russian social movements**

A large amount of recent studies on Russian social movements were written by researchers associated with the Institute for Collective Action [institut kollektivnykh deystviy] based in Saint Petersburg. The institute published several collections of case studies on social movements, such as *Gorodskie Dvizheniya Rossii v 2009–2013 godakh na puti k politicheskomu* (2013). The book analyses the emergence of some social movements all over Russia and follows their evolution. The authors explore how groups of citizens come together, raise protest on a certain single issue, and finally try to stop a presumed harmful policy from being implemented – be it the construction of a factory, the closure of a factory that would lead to mass unemployment, social reforms, or forest clearances. These single-issue movements often evolve to – as the Institute for Collective Action refers to it – “city movements”. While being engaged in such a movement, citizens often start dealing with other topics as well. They broaden their field of action, and the movement becomes a stable institution (Miryasova 2013: 272). Revisiting those case studies, it becomes obvious that political circumstances changed a lot since 2013. Clearly, state repressions against local social movements in the provinces were not absent at the time. In some cases, they were even severe and frightful. But they were also applied more chaotically. For instance, in 2008 a leader of an ecological movement to stop clearances in Khimki Forest, close to Moscow, was brutally beaten up. He almost died in the aftermath (Clément/ Demidovyy 2013: 151). Activists interviewed for the study often recount acts of intimidation, e.g. threats to lose their jobs. What makes the period from 2009 to 2013 different is probably the diversity and openness of the political and economic elite. Successful movements portrayed in the book often manage to gain support of some influential local politicians, Duma deputies, party

officials or businessmen. They also managed to gain access to media coverage early on in their struggle.

In comparison, the copper mine conflict in Chelyabinsk exposes how the state's power architecture has become more authoritarian over time. Formal and informal changes within the Russian power architecture make local and regional elites depend less on voter satisfaction. That makes it more probable that politicians react on grassroots movements by ignoring their demands and repressing them. As a closed circle of regional elites is consolidating, it also becomes possible to systematise repressions against outsiders and grassroots social movements.

Political elites' increased use of repression must be considered a consequence of the Bolotnaya protests in 2011 and 2012, the wide social movement that disputed falsified election results. In the aftermath of Bolotnaya, lawmakers and law enforcement officials developed a whole new pattern of repressive strategies. In post-Bolotnaya Russia, repression has increasingly become a mechanism in Russia's everyday political life (Gabowitsch 2017: 10). It has often replaced political dialog, party competition, compromise and means of co-optation as a strategy to encounter demands of citizens. When political and business elites prefer being silent on conflictual topics, repression often becomes the preferred way of communicating to citizens. Thus, in post-Bolotnaya Russia repressive means expose the essential aspect of political conflicts.

Deliberation and decision-making often happen in closed circles, in the executive branch or in parliamentary commissions entirely controlled by Russia's ruling party. Information on conflicts within Russia's ruling elite often only leaks to media on the condition that sources remain anonymous. It is difficult to formulate a judgment on Russian politics on this basis. In contrast to that, repression is one of the most accessible parts of Russia's political life; it qualifies societal conflicts more than anything else. Because of the ubiquity of repression in societal conflicts, I will focus the upcoming analysis on it. The study will not discuss the periodic working group meetings between state officials and environmental activists and other efforts by regional elites to co-opt environmentalists. The several efforts to create working groups and environmental councils did not last long. Activists and scientific experts describe them as unproductive (Denisov 2017).

One string of sociological literature investigates the legal tools by which the state can undermine civil activism. This is mainly focused on laws designed to control NGOs. An essay by Moser and Skripchenko (2018) examines how non-governmental organisations (NGOs) adapt to the Foreign Agent Law established in 2012. It requires organisations

undertaking political activities to register as an “organisation that functions as a foreign agent” if they receive funding from a foreign country. The law has been criticised as too ambiguous. Some scholars argue that the work of an NGO is necessarily political (Belakurova et al. 2013). Thus, the law can be applied arbitrarily. Even if there is no foreign donor and a low level of international cooperation, authorities still find ways to apply the law in respect to certain organisations (Kovalev 2019). Moser and Skripchenko analyse in what respect the foreign agent register provides a stigma, how it affects an organisation’s prestige. In two case-studies on NGOs, the authors highlight how registered organisations are forced to renew their structure in order to survive.

By adding to this research area, I seek to show how informally organized social movements are affected by repression. In my case studies, repressive measures mainly target individual activists. It becomes harder to predict what those measures will look like, as there is little legal ground to restrict an individual citizen’s political activism. Thus, it becomes also harder to prepare survival strategies to prevent the effects of repressive measures. This appendage seems important because, also as a consequence of the more and more restrictive NGO legislation, civil activists in Russia choose more often to remain formally unbound (Turovets 2019). I argue that it is necessary to take into account a wide pattern of different measures in order to understand how environmental movements are repressed in present-day Russia. The entirety of repressive measures has to be considered systematically, from blatantly violent measures to more subtle forms. It is necessary to understand how those various measures are adding up to each other.

### 2.1.2 How dictatorships deal with environmental hazards

Is Russia a dictatorship? Some scholars classify it as a hybrid regime in the grey zone between democracy and dictatorship (Carothers 2002: 13; Moss et al. 2018: 591; Robertson 2011). In some respect, this is appropriate. Some oppositional activists I spoke to consider the present-day political battlefield still as democratic. It certainly matters that Russia at least aspires to be democratic and occasionally sticks to the rule of law. At the same time, Russia reveals all criteria that would qualify it as a dictatorship and, respectively, as an authoritarian state. I argue that considering the contemporary Russian state as a dictatorship would be more accurate. In their book *How Dictatorships Work* (2018) Geddes et al. develop the following criteria, that would be sufficient to characterize a state as authoritarian. Firstly, a seizure group, i.e. the military or a party, monopolises power in all spheres of the state. If a seizure group has initially taken power by free and fair elections, Geddes et al. might code a country as a dictatorship nevertheless, in case it remains in power by committing election fraud, or by refusing to admit popular oppositional candidates (Geddes et al 2018: 5-6). By these criteria, it might be arguable *when* exactly Russia under Putin started being a dictatorship. But at the time of the events investigated in this study, it definitely counts as a dictatorship. Clearly, there is a seizure group in the form of the political party United Russia [Yedinaya Rossiya]. Candidates of the party do not necessarily win all elections. They might very rarely lose regional elections in a few regions, for example in Khabarovsk located on the Northern Pacific coast (Azar 2019). As far as elections in important regions are concerned, the state mobilizes many resources to make the party's candidates win. Apart from outright voter fraud and the non-admittance of oppositional candidates, those resources include the immediate election reruns if it brought a wrong, inconvenient result.

It is debatable whether the party United Russia is the most important political institution in contemporary Russia. The power of important party apparatchiks might decrease in favour of the Secret Service FSB, other law enforcement institutions, officials in the presidential administration and informal networks closely tied to Putin. This kind of power competition is also characteristic for dictatorships. Geddes et al. reveal and explain dictatorships' tendency to rely on their secret services to repress potential adversaries, but also to simply gather information. The more authoritarian elites rely on the secret service, the more powerful it becomes. The importance of informal networks closely tied to an authoritarian ruler can also be characteristic for dictatorships. Geddes et al. call this tendency personalism. Recent research on authoritarian regimes has focused on how dictatorships adopt to the wave of democratization that started in 1974 with a democratic revolution in Portugal. Scholars argue that the increased number of democratic states force dictatorships to adopt their regime.

Because of both foreign and citizens' pressure, it becomes less tolerable to rely on arbitrary despotism. Dictatorships are forced to admit a restricted form of societal pluralism and elite competition through partially free and open elections. They are also forced to put repressive measures onto a legalistic ground. Research on dictatorships increasingly emphasises other pillars of authoritarian rule: legitimation and co-optation. legitimation means that authoritarian regime has to offer a political program and set of beliefs to the ruled classes. Just as democratic governments, an autocratic ruler's success depends on whether he sticks to this proclaimed beliefs and whether he achieves his political goals (Gerschewski 2013: 18-21). Co-optation describes the ability to buy the loyalty of potentials rivals (Gerschewski 2013: 22).

In recent years, political scientists, economists and journalists have worked on theories that try to explain why it is useful for an autocratic regime to allow independent non-controlled civil activism and free media. The result are theories on something that could be called freedom calculation.

The foreign affairs journalist William Dobson evolves such a theory in his book *The dictator's learning curve* (2012) which is widely quoted in academic literature on authoritarian regimes. He mainly grounds his model on interviews with policy makers and civil activists from Russia and China made in 2011 and 2012. Thereby, he states that the Soviet Union, a much more repressive state than contemporary Russia, was largely disadvantaged, as its state apparatus was very difficult to control due to its repressiveness. The ruling political elite had to trust apparatchiks in the regions and in the secret service. No other means to obtain information on economic performance and on possible crises existed. Independent press and independent expert circles did practically not exist in the provinces. At the same time, regional elites had incentives to remain silent about their own mistakes and failures. In a country as large as the Soviet Union, it is especially difficult to oversee the whole country. Thus, vital problems concerning the survival of the regime remained unsolved and even unobserved for years. A dictator who has taken a lesson out of the Soviet Union's failure can strengthen his regime by allowing civil activism and free media to a certain extent. They provide a cheap additional means to control regional political elites. Dobson suggests that authoritarian regimes like Russia in 2011 and 2012 try to profit from the independent knowledge created by oppositional groups such as NGOs, academics, free media. At the same time, opposition groups are granted virtually no access to legislative or executive power (Dobson 2012: 13-48).

In his book *The politics of protest in hybrid regimes: Managing dissent in Post-Communist Russia* (2015) Graeme Robertson comes to a similar conclusion. He summarises his findings

on political elite's relationship to independent social movements as follows: "Other examples discussed here include techniques to license civil society and manage NGOs in ways that provide the state with information, while limiting the capacity of groups to organize opposition." (Robertson 2011: 13)

By this approach, Robertson and Dobson can well explain the purpose of state institution like the Societal Chambers [obshchestvennye palaty] or the Presidential Council for Development of Civil Society and Human Rights. Those institutions have some privileged access to state institutions like prison camps in order to monitor human rights situation. However, they cannot propose major legislative changes. A weakness of those explanatory effort can be explained by the short period of time in which the observations are made. Dobson relies his theories on observations made exclusively in 2011 and 2012. He has no long-time perspective. Thus he cannot predict how stable the system is he tries to understand. Following the development of institutions like the Societal Chambers and the Presidential Council for Human Rights, it turns out that those institutions are highly vulnerable. Regional elites are easily tempted to only admit loyalists to those institutions. Elites can hardly be stopped from silencing local journalists. Thus, it is not clear whether the authoritarian order in Russia is really based on such a freedom calculation or whether this is more an ideal aspired to. Spaces of freedom and institutions that provide accountability exist in contemporary Russia. But they stand on unsolid grounds. They often vanish in a fast and unexpected manner. No laws, no reliable informal agreements define and guarantee spaces for civic participation. Dobson and Robertson do not sufficiently recognize the instability of a dictatorship's social contract.

In a theoretically more advanced manner, a similar freedom calculation is theorized by a team of economists led by Sergey Guriev. Based on statistical models, they correlate the degree of freedom of the press in a country and its oil resources. As a result, they state that in non-democratic systems freedom of press is the smaller, the bigger the countries oil resources are. This leads them to conclude that effective work of the state bureaucracy is less important in countries with many natural resources. At the same time, they observe a link between the surface area of a country and its degree of free press. The bigger the country the harder it becomes to control the bureaucracy. Thereby, free press becomes useful. The danger of a free press consists in its ability to make oppositional voices heard and to coordinate the opposition's activities. As a consequence, another important correlation to the freedom of press is a country's population and, more precisely, its level of education. The higher the level of education among a country's population, the smaller often becomes the degree of free press in a country. Russia is not included in the study's data set. Applying the study's

findings on Russia, it can be concluded that the country's autocratically ruling elites have highly conflicting incentives to admit or to restrain freedom of the press (Guriev et al. 2013).

In response to this literature, the following study will highlight the central role of repression for authoritarian rule. Against the argument that "repression is too costly a way to maintain stability in the long run" (Gerschewski 2013: 21), I will provide evidence for how modern authoritarian regimes lower the costs of repressive means by privatizing it. Repression exerted by private actors has so far been rarely addressed in the research on repression. It is meaningful when it comes along as a convenient and rather cheap compromise between different elites in an authoritarian system. The following study will exemplify how repression of civil activism is inspired initially by the economic interests of a local political and economic elite, but would probably not be applicable without the long-term interests of national rulers to exert preventive repression, i.e. to generally discourage people from demanding political participation.

Furthermore, I will argue that environmental conflicts expose one of the most vulnerable points within the authoritarian state order. Most often ecological problems cannot be as easily understood. It generally requires expensive expertise that can only be provided by independent state institutions or by very large NGOs. The scale of those independent institutions would by far exceed the scale of independent organisations Russian rulers would be willing to tolerate. Cynically spoken, apart from a rare whistleblower, a few journalists or activists willing to risk their life for the public good, it does not need much to uncover corruption, human rights abuses or an ineffective social policy. Luckily, those resources are provided in many Russian regions. In order to uncover failing environmental policies, a huge variety of non-corrupt scientific expertise is needed: physicians, geologists, chemists and other scientists with access to reliable data and equipment. This is more difficult to maintain. Vulnerability does not necessarily mean that the survival of Russia's authoritarian order is at stake because of the system's incapability to produce a responsible environmental policy. This would be too speculative to predict. But at least, it seems predictable that the Russian state in its current design will probably continue to do serious damage to nature and cause major health hazards to its citizens. The obstacles for a responsible environmental policy are high.

Summarising the last two subchapters, the following study will collect evidence for three theses:

- 1) As regional elites increasingly exert repressions, a more and more standardized pattern of systematic repression emerges. I will expose this pattern applied against environmental activism.
- 2) Repressions are an important instrument for consolidating authoritarian rule. I will show that repressions are not necessarily costly, e.g. if political elites manage to privatize them. Cases of privatised repressions are rarely studied in the field of repression research.
- 3) Modern dictatorships allow small degrees of civic freedom in order to protect themselves from failure. On the field of environmental policy, this system does not work, at least not in the particular conditions of Russia's authoritarianism. The system's incapability to resolve environmental problems causes major suffering to the people subject to the contemporary Russian dictatorship.

## **2.2 Theory of repression**

### **2.2.1 Definition of the term “repression”**

A preliminary methodological question in the field of repression research is how to name it. Some scholars think that the term repression is too morally loaded, too normative. They recommend the term “state control” as a replacement (Earl 2006: 139). Earl argues that repression as such is not always socially harmful. If it is directed against fanatic and violent political groups, it might be appropriate and desirable. I agree with the position that policing political groups can be important and necessary in some cases, e.g. if they have a violent agenda. However Earl's suggestion to use the term “state control” lags behind one of her major insights: repression cannot only be accomplished by the state, but also by private actors. Furthermore, the repressive measures under focus in this study largely go beyond “controlling” environmental activism. Most of the actions analysed here are severely destructive and drastically violent in either psychological or physical terms. Thus, the term “control” seems to inappropriately understate the analysed phenomena.

A second problem concerns the cultural connotation of the Russian word *repressiya*. In a Russian context it seems ambiguous to talk about repression, as the equivalent Russian term is often associated with mass executions and mass deportations in the Stalin era. The online outlet [ovdinfo.org](http://ovdinfo.org) that systematically covers the policing of political activism uses the term “politpressing”. During my field research, I sometimes experienced that people did not understand my question when I asked whether they became the target of a *repressiya*. In the usage that is still widespread today, the term *repressiya* originates in the 1950s after Stalin's death in the Chrushev era. The word is considered a euphemism that played into the hands of the Soviet political elite. If people consider the dimension of Stalin's crimes as the baseline



for their understanding of repression, it will be hard to condemn any less horrible civil rights restriction. Therefore, scholars suggest that Stalin's policies are more adequately characterised as terror, whereas the term repression should be kept for a wider pattern of authoritarian procedures (Guseynov 2019). I agree with Guseynov's stand and will use the term repression characterising the phenomena being the subject of the following study.

An often-quoted definition of repression originates from Stockdill: „Any action taken by authorities to impede mobilization, harass and intimidate activists, divide organizations and physically assault, arrest or imprison and/or kill movement participants.” (Quoted in Earl 2003: 45). This definition might however only hold true for the most obvious and superficially visible parts of repressive actions. In practice, less violent forms of repression are mostly used that are still very efficient and possibly damaging to activists. Furthermore, this understanding does not take into account that not only state actors are responsible for repressive actions. They can also be implemented by private actors. A broader definition of repression provides Charles Tilly. He considers it as “any action by another group which raises the contender's cost of collective action.” (Quoted in Earl 2003: 46). This definition is too general. It would also include the example of an election campaign digging up dirt on an opponent. If this is done successfully, it eventually raises the cost of the opponent's election campaign. He or she is forced to formulate talking points in the answer to this smear campaign. However, in the common understanding of the term digging up dirt on somebody would not always be considered repressive; at least not if the elections pass in fair circumstances.

I therefore suggest two expansions of Tilly's definition. Firstly, the agent of a repressive action has to be in a position of predominance in relation to the repressed actor. Secondly, even if an agent of repressive actions is not necessarily a state actor, repressive actions nevertheless resemble activities of the police or secret services.

For the sake of clarity, I reformulate a definition combining Tilly's and Stockdill's understanding: As repression counts any action – either by the state or by hegemonically powerful private actors – that aims to weaken protest movements by undermining the protest movements' working conditions. One form of repression is direct (mostly state-based) violence or, more generally spoken, the use of force. But repression is in no way synonymous with that. On the contrary, more subtle forms of repression, so-called channeling, can be a far more effective means. Even if repression is not applied by a state institution, most forms of repression remind of policing methods (Earl 2006: 129-131).

### **2.2.2 Analytical categories**

Out of repression research several analytical steps can be distilled. Firstly, the agent of a repressive action shall be determined. This agent shall be characterised in three manners: a state actor closely tied to national political elites, state actor closely tied to local political elites or private actors. Secondly, a repressive action is to be considered as either violent coercion, or as channeling. Thirdly, repressive actions vary in their visibility. There are actions that count as observable. They are either documented on tape, they can be verified by official court or police documents or they are confirmed by reliable testimony, at best from several independent sources. Apart from those observable actions, this study will deal with a lot of events that have been – for very different reasons – unobserved. As I had no access to sources close to the security organs, there are, supposedly, a lot of actions that remain totally undisclosed for this study. During the interviews, an activist pointed out that there might be some invisible efforts to create cleavages within the protest movement. Another activist expressed certainty that his phone was tapped. However, they both could not provide clear evidence. I will take into account that there could be a number of absolutely unobserved repressive actions. This also means that this study works with a sense of incompleteness and uncertainty. It cannot be precisely described how closely state actors and private actors are watching the protest movement “StopGOK”. Apart from these totally unobserved events, there are partly visible repressive actions that remain nevertheless rather unobserved. A whole spectrum of half visible events can be laid out.

On the one hand, there are visible events lacking a clear causal explanation. Two weeks before the municipal elections in Chelyabinsk, an independent candidate announced on Facebook that he will withdraw from the ticket in his electoral district. As he is one of the most active and visible figures among “StopGOK” activists, he might have had a good chance to be elected. He explained that he will not have enough time to work as a city deputy. This is however a questionable explanation. At first, he might have known his time schedule before he considered his candidacy. Secondly, the electoral system in Chelyabinsk does not force him automatically to become a member of the city council after winning an election. At first, he would become deputy of the municipal council that plays more of a symbolic role. Then, all municipal deputies of the city elect the deputies of the state дума which has real influence on political decision-making. So, if he was elected to the purely symbolic municipal council, the activist could just have refused to candidate for the city council. He could have been put under pressure; but the facts are not openly disclosed. While doing field research, I dealt a lot with similar phenomena. The outline of an important fact can be grasped; however, the victim of a repressive action is unwilling to fully share or confirm. In

most of these cases, the risks people would have to take would be too high, were they to share their stories in their entirety. For instance, I struggled to reveal cases of people that ended their environmental activism, as they were threatened to be dismissed from work (see chapter 5.2). The difficulty to describe such cases is plausible and obvious. If somebody receives serious threats to be fired because of her political commitments, she might also be unwilling to fully disclose these threats as this could also lead her to being fired.

On the other hand, some repressive actions can only partly be explored. Apart from other repressive measures they are well visible. However, they do not fit into the logic of Russian independent media's news coverage. They are observable but remain rather unobserved. This can be due to different reasons. For instance, they might not appear important at first glance. By entering Russian court buildings citizens need to show their passport and disclose to which session they go. Court officials document this information. This can be an important means to gather personal data of activists involved in a social movement. It can make people shy away from visiting a court session. But it is hard to determine its exact effects. In other cases, repressive measures are unobserved because they are too obvious. This might particularly be the case for the Russian administrative law restricting the right to gather in public. As the practice of sharply restricting public rallies and demonstrations in Russia is rather widespread and has already a long tradition in the newest history of Russia, it often remains undisputed.

Collected data on repression can be analysed in the following matrix (Inspired by Earl 2006 132):

	<b>Force/ violence</b>		<b>Channeling</b>	
<b>Who is the agent of a repressive action?</b>	<b>Is the repressive action observable?</b>	<b>Is it relatively/ absolutely unobserved?</b>	<b>Is the repressive action observable?</b>	<b>Is it relatively/ absolutely unobserved?</b>
<b>State institutions connected to the national elites</b>	Use of the military or federal police units to crash demonstrations	Use of secret services' capacities to manipulate movements	Propaganda campaign against a social movement in the federal state media	–
<b>State institutions connected to local/ regional elites</b>	Use of police force to dissolve demonstrations; efforts to dissolve an organisation (e.g. with the help of the foreign agent law)	Using law enforcement organs in order to collect information on protest movements; threatening activists to legally persecute them	Refusing to register independent candidates for elections, if they are associated to social movements	Restriction of protests, allowing protests only under certain forms and under certain conditions
<b>Private institutions</b>	Financing private security forces that use violence	A company threatens to dismiss employees who are political activists	Media campaigns against social movements	Private security companies collect information on the participant of a social movement

By characterising repressive measures in the following chapters, it will often be hard to determine a single author of a repressive measure. We will often deal with forms of cooperation. It should be kept in mind that this framework is not capable of putting all phenomena into the right place. Nevertheless, it will help to understand the dynamics of repression and of local politics in Chelyabinsk. The US-based sociological research on repression and state control has provided few examples of private, non-state actors exerting repression on social movements. In this study, private associations and enterprises will play a crucial role. Their contribution might even be a decisive factor in successfully containing the environmental movement “StopGOK”.

In addition, theory of repression provides several patterns for explaining repressions. It encourages the investigation of the intent and effect of repressive measures. Five different explanatory patterns will become relevant to this study:

1) *The threat model* suggests that social movements will be treated by repressive means if established local, national or business elites consider them a threat. The model suggests that a movement will be repressed when it uses a confrontational strategy, when undermines

public trust into authorities and when, as a consequence, elites fear to lose power because of the movement's activities (Earl 2003: 52).

2) *The weakness model* suggests that movements will be repressed, the more vulnerable they are. According to this theory, actors will be targeted when they can be repressed and weakened by modest means; it will be repressed, if the costs are not too high (Earl 2003: 52).

3) *The political opportunity approach* highlights that repressive tactics change in respect to the political cycle. The window of opportunity for certain repressive actions can open and close again (Earl 2003: 56). The following study will expose how the need for repressive strategies can vary in respect to election cycles and in regard of different states of the copper mine's construction period.

4) *The approach focusing on law enforcement characteristics* presumes that an important reason for an actor applying repressive tactics is caused by its inner organisational structure, by bureaucratic and hierarchic rules, rather than by a perception of threat (Earl 2003: 58). This possibility was mainly shown by a scholar with access to FBI files. David Cunningham examines the surveillance and persecution of the New Left by the FBI. He observes that orders given from the centre to determine which political group is persecuted by which intensity, often depends on a group's name. This can lead to surprising results. In some cities, radical political groups with high numbers of membership remain almost untouched, whereas irrelevant groups are closely observed and infiltrated. To Cunningham, it seems "as if the directorate allocated controls almost in an arbitrary manner, consistently threatening certain inactive field offices, while all but ignoring others" (Cunningham 2003: 233). As this study lacks any perspective inside repressive actors, it will not be possible for us to determine which repressive acts are caused by an arbitrary bureaucratic logic or by power competition between different agencies. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the special structure of Russian law enforcement can always be a reason for the initiation of repressive actions. Studies and news reports show that policing in Russia regularly produces surprising outcomes and unexpected events. Certain characteristics of Russia's state institutions, such as the "hypercentralisation" (Titaev 2019) of law enforcement agencies might contribute to the police's flexible usability in repressive strategies against political opponents. In its institutional architecture, the Russian court system is unusually hierarchic and obedient to the presidential administration which makes it also potentially usable for political purposes (Sokolov 2019a; Sokolov 2019b). Those institutional and legal preconditions that foster the use of repressive strategies in Russia will be taken into account in this study.

5) Recent research on authoritarianism deals with *preventive repression*. This term describes the task of the security apparatus to weaken political forces before they would become a

threat to the whole regime (Dragu & Przeworski 2019: 79). Although Chelyabinsk is two time-zones away from Moscow, where an uprising against the Putin regime would most likely need to take place, the Russian security apparatus also considers some long-term strategic interests while confronting environmental activism, as my data will show.

That eventually means that each repressive action becoming the subject of this study will be analysed according to the following parameters:

- a) Initiator of repressive actions: regional politics, economic elites or national elites?
- b) Form: force or channeling?
- c) Observability
- d) Intents and effects of repressive actions

### **2.3 Applied research methods**

The research for this study is based on a methodological triangulation of semi-structured qualitative interviews, field observations and the interpretation of media material. In March 2019, I spent 10 days in Chelyabinsk in order to gather information. I recorded qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven environmental activists and one local journalist. I prepared for each meeting individually trying to focus on the person's own engagement in the movement "StopGOK". Five of my interviewees are male, two are female. I will interpret the collected material using the documentary method. The information given to me in interviews will first of all serve as the factual base of this study. The cross-analysis will lead to conclusions the activists themselves do not necessarily have conscious knowledge about (Bohnsack 2007: 11-16). By adding those individual experiences and field observations, I will put together a mosaic of the movement's history. The interviews took between half an hour and two hours. I mainly asked biographical questions. Those were focused on activists' personal involvement in the movement StopGOK and on earlier political engagements: „How did you hear about the movement StopGOK? How did you decide to participate?“ I tried not to bring up the topic of repressions directly in order to give my interviewees the chance to pick themselves topics they considered relevant. If the topic did not come up by itself, however, I asked about experiences with police forces, private security forces or other potential agents of repressive actions. Apart from that, I also interviewed people as experts, i.e. asking for opinion and analytical conclusions: “Do you think citizens' participation in the movement was too small? If yes, why?“ During the interviews, I received a lot of hints to factual information I later checked up in media outlets, studies and reports. Two exemplary interviews are attached in the appendix of this paper.

The final decision to focus this study on repression was only made following the impression from my interviews. The interviews convinced me that this this is the most productive angle for understanding the conflict.

How did I select the interviewees? StopGOK is an open informal organisation. It is not a clearly defined entity. It has no clear leadership, but a rather open hierarchy. StopGOK activists claim that their movement in vast parts consists of Chelyabinsk citizens between 30 and 60, the majority being women. This seems credible according to the impressions I got from observing organisational meetings and to a broad check of users in their groups on social media. Since 2013, different people have been in the movement's unofficial core. At the time of my field trip, different groups of the movement worked seemingly independently from each other; Some were more concerned about municipal elections, others were more concerned about organising rallies.

The number of participants in the movement can be counted in different ways. Activists often mention a group "StopGOK" in the social network Vkontakte with about 30.000 members. It is not clear what this says about levels of commitment. The largest authorized demonstrations against the copper mine attracted several thousand citizens, between 3.000 and 10.000 according to different accounts. During the most intense phase of the battle in 2017, the movement had a leading organising nucleus consisting of just about a dozen people. In order to choose potential interviewees, I looked for names of activists that appeared in news coverage – in articles on ovdinfo.org and Novaya Gazeta. Via social media, I directly wrote to those activists asking for interviews. I introduced myself as a journalist and as a social scientist who wants to write a journalistic article on the copper mine conflict in Chelyabinsk and do research on environmental conflicts in Russia. I considered this journalistic article on Chelyabinsk as a further incentive for people to talk to me. Russian social movements being repressed by the state often regard coverage of foreign media as a means of protection. This turned out to be true. Activists that were legally persecuted in March took photos with me and posted them on social media after my article was published in the German weekly newspaper "Jungle World" (Latz 2019a, Latz 2019b). On invitation, I joined strategy meetings. The observation of those inner debates on ongoing plans and projects helped me to verify certain claims about the movement's structure and gave some insights on tactics to prevent repression in the daily work.

Furthermore, I got in contact with some of my interviewees on the street while I was observing the movement's agitation rallies.

It was generally easy to get in touch with activists. But for several reasons it was not that easy to agree on appointments. Firstly, as the movement is not linked to professional full-time activists, people have only a limited amount of resources they can dedicate to activism. People may not consider it as the most urgent in their daily planning to talk to social scientists. Secondly, the movement had experiences with paid infiltrators that successfully manipulated activists, undermined the movement's moral purity. Those experiences, as one interviewee presumed, made people hesitate to share information on their personal history and on the movement's structure. I tried to counteract this skepticism by transparency. I translated the newspaper article I wrote into Russian and made it accessible on my blog (Latz 2019a). Thereby, I tried to erase doubts about my intentions. The feedback of activists helped me to correct factual mistakes and to initiate further discussions.

With regards to field observations, I studied the urban and geographic particularities of Chelyabinsk and of Karabash, a monocity in the Oblast' that exclusively lives from the copper industry. By this, I aimed to better understand the city's ecological hazards and to observe how people experience public spaces, how they perceive politics, corruption and environmental hazards in their everyday life.

I collected material from local and national newspaper, mainly material shared by local activists on social media; which also helps to reconstruct the movement's history; I also paid attention to comments on social media. They often echo emotional and political dynamics at different points of time.

In order to understand the impact of all-Russian networks of environmental organisations and to get a broader picture on environmental activism in Russia, I conducted two interviews with employees at the Greenpeace headquarters in Moscow. I conducted an interview with an activist from Krasnoyarsk who works in a group that monitors air pollution. This background knowledge helped to better understand common features of repressive policies in the field of Russian environmental activism.

A methodological problem has partly been discussed already in the previous chapter: the study can hardly take into account all relevant perspectives. In order to understand patterns of repression, it would have been useful to talk to representatives of different state institutions. However, my requests to meet representatives of the state, e.g. the nature protection agency "Rosпотребнадзор" remained unanswered. I had the chance to talk a few times on the phone with a representative of the Chelyabinsk city parliament who runs an ecological organisation close to the city administration. During these phone conversations, he kept on asking me what kind of people I met in Chelyabinsk. In a distrustful manner, he



suggested on the phone: “We don’t need foreigners around here who just come to the city in order to write that everything is bad. We already know those.” After ensuring, that I am neutral and do not represent anybody’s side, he agreed that we can meet. Then he delayed our appointment several times while he kept asking me about my activities in Chelyabinsk on the phone. Finally, he stopped answering to my emails and did not pick up the phone. This was the closest I got looking for information from the local authorities’ point of view. Lacking such insight makes it difficult to answer many interesting questions concerning repressions. It is hard to determine any strategic pattern: How are activists chosen to be legally persecuted, fined, or emotionally distressed? What is the strategic intent? It is also difficult to disclose how the different state security agencies (FSB, Centre for Counteractions against Extremism) collaborate with common police forces. It remains largely unclear how oligarchs exert influence on the police force and on the city administration. As the responsiveness of entrepreneurs and state institutions is so little, it becomes sometimes difficult to verify the credibility of activists. It is often not possible to check the other side of activists’ accounts on issues such as police brutality. In lieu of such verification, I will set those accounts into perspective and context and thus explain their plausibility. That means, I will check, whether similar repressive measures are applied in other parts of Russia. Few studies investigate different aspects of the collaboration between state officials and entrepreneurs (e.g. Volkov 2002 and Favarel-Garrigues 2011). In my analysis, I will discuss aspects of those books, in order to put some indirect light on present-day political dynamics in Chelyabinsk.

Journalistic articles that hint at certain conflicts between state institution, between regional elites and national elites on the topic of environmental affairs mostly reveal sources that spoke on the condition of anonymity. Therefore, the reliability of information given on this condition stands half in doubt. I will make the sources of information in the fluent text (rather than in footnotes) as transparent as necessary in order to reflect this problem.

### **3 Historical background**

#### **3.1 Environmental disasters in Chelyabinskaya Oblast’**

Conflicts and poverty caused by environmental disasters are a central theme in the region’s entire industrial history. Those disasters most often went together with political mismanagement. Looking back into history, Chelyabinsk citizens find many reasons to distrust companies and local government in regard to environmental affairs. The region’s history partly explains why a strong enduring protest movement could emerge in Chelyabinsk.

### 3.1.2 Reckless industrialisation in the 1930s

Chelyabinsk is the biggest city in the Southern Ural region. It was founded as a cornerstone on a trade route between China and Western Europe. As the region is full of precious raw materials, such as coal, copper, gold and Uranium the region became a hotbed in the history of Soviet industrialisation. The first mines were opened at the beginning of the 20th century. The development was vastly accelerated with the implementation of the first five-year plan in 1928. Stalin commanded the construction of a new city, Magnitogorsk, located approximately 250 kilometers south of Chelyabinsk, still belonging to the administrative entity Chelyabinskaya Oblast’.

The Soviets planned to build Magnitogorsk as a truly socialist city from scratch. The evolution of this project was intensely covered by Soviet propaganda. It was more than a strategically important economic factor; it became one of the most prestigious projects in the first Soviet five-year plans. Magnitogorsk was supposed to become the leading example of what the socialist society should look like (Schlögel 2017: 120). The history of Magnitogorsk, as reconstructed in the study *Magnetic Mountain* (1995) by Stephen Kotkin, also reveals a lot about urbanistic features marking Chelyabinsk. Magnitogorsk’s construction site was located in mere nothingness, in the steppe. Close to many natural sources of metal, the centre of the city became the gigantic steel plant. The factory’s territory reached 200 square kilometers (Schlögel 2017: 119).

The construction of the city was entirely focused on the needs of the steel plants. With the help of the shock worker movement and with different sources of forced labour, plans were fulfilled in an astonishing pace. Workers built a dam in order to save water for industrial production. While politicians and engineers stuck to an ambitious plan in building the factory, a clear idea how the city itself should look like was missing. It was aspired to the “maximum socialisation of urban life” (Kotkin 1995: 116). But politicians and architects had no clear agreement on what that meant and how this should be achieved. Years after the steel plant had started production, party apparatchiks still discussed whether the city should be built on the left or on the right riverside of the dammed Ural river. In the meantime, workers and their families gathered in different tent camps and improvised buildings. For years, around 200.000 people lived without schools and hospitals. Most of the streets did not have names, which made it impossible to find persons. Electricity and sanitary infrastructure did not exist. While public transport was restricted to one tram line and a dozen buses, many inhabitants had to walk eight to ten kilometers from their barracks to their shop in the metallurgical complex every day. The urban life in the socialist ideal was far less organised than in cities

that grew over the centuries – if it was organised at all. The city was hardly perceived as a town. It was rather perceived as an unrelated row of poorly developed settlements that were hard to control. Reviewing the history of Magnitorsk also makes it clear that environmental risks are not new to the region. Magnitogorsk was built in the steppe with little access to water. It took its drinking water from the artificial lake that also supplied the metallurgical complex. The factory also led toxic wastewater back to the lake. The result was an ongoing health crisis. Typhus epidemics regularly appeared in Magnitogorsk (Kotkin 1995: 106-145). As will be pointed out farther below, environmental activists in today's Chelyabinsk fear that they will be deprived of their drinking water source. This fear can be linked to collective memory; it can be traced back to tragic events in the local history.

Kotkin's study also sheds light on an important political legacy. Political power was all but controlled by the central Soviet Government. The factory was directly subordinated to the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry (NKTP). In the 1930s the factory owned and distributed 90 percent of apartments in the city. The factory organised a major part of the public transport system. The factory's major influence on the shape of Magnitogorsk was visible on the city's central square. The local headquarter of the communist party as well as the house of soviets were under construction until the midst of the 1930s. The factory's administrative complex (as well as the building of the secret service NKVD) were finished much earlier. Thus, it was obvious who ruled the city (Kotkin: 280-293).

This hegemony of the industrial complex – which is closely tied to the heights of the power vertical – remains until today. As we shall see, big metallurgical and mining companies in Chelyabinsk can hardly be made accountable by local lawmakers and local governments. Their rights and duties are mainly determined by federal laws and its interpretation by federal law enforcement services. Thus, until today the industrial complex in the Chelyabinskaya Oblast' exerts major influence in politics. Regardless of the many regime changes in Russia since the 1930s, the basic architecture of power changed surprisingly little in Chelyabinskaya Oblast'.

Another historic legacy that can be taken away from Kotkin's study concerns the biography of ruling politicians in the region. Ruling Party officials were often involved in managing the metallurgical factory. In this double role, party work was often neglected. Party officials revealed that they were hardly informed about activities of different basic groups. The communist party that was supposed to be a governing institution became thus a merely "the same as factory administration" (Kotkin 1995: 324). Nowadays, there is a state and governing structure in Chelyabinsk. In many cases, however, ruling political elites are identical with industry representatives. Before becoming governor of Chelyabinskaya Oblast'

Boris Dubrovskiy was the CEO of the Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Complex (MMK). Dmitriy Fedechkin, from 2016 to 2019 head of the press service of the regional government used to work the copper company RMK. After working as a vice-governor Oleg Grachev became RMK's vice-president for regional development in Chelyabinskaya Oblast' (Shestakov 2019).

### **3.1.2 The region's nuclear burden**

Additional environmental catastrophes happened in the North of Chelyabinskaya Oblast'. The secret city Chelyabinsk-40 that did not appear on maps until 1994 was one of the Soviet Union's major centres for the production of nuclear weapons. In the years after the Second World War, the Soviet Union's nuclear weapon program was overseen by Lavrentiy Beriya who worked for many years as head of the secret service. Beriya applied reckless methods in order to develop an atomic bomb as fast as possible. The facilities were mainly built by convicted prisoners. Many leading scientists were found among prisoners.

In the Gulag, the Soviets also found some of the world's most acclaimed scientists, such as the charismatic Nikolay Timofeev-Resovskiy (1900-1981). Some scientists were thus saved from starvation and sent to work in a number of secret cities responsible for the nuclear program. Among them were also 200-250 scientifically educated German war prisoners (Mick 2000: 95). To the fate of Timofeev-Resovskiy the writer Daniil Granin dedicated a documentary novel. Timofeev-Resovskiy studied biology in Moscow and was sent to Berlin in 1926 in a scientists' exchange program. He stayed in Germany until the end of the Second World War. In the 1930s the Soviet state increasingly interfered in the sciences. As the agronomist Trofim Lysenko gained decisive influence in academia, it became outright dangerous to do research on genetics based on Mendel's theories. Many of Timofeev-Resovskiy's teachers and colleagues were deported and killed in this period. Even after the Nazis' seizure of power, Timofeev-Resovskiy remained relatively safe in Berlin. While Lysenko detached the Soviet sciences from international cooperation and worldwide standards, Timofeev-Resovskiy regular met with the world's leading scientists, among them Nobel laureates, the nuclear physicists Niels Bohr and Erwin Schrödinger. Immediately after the second world war, a leading Soviet bureaucrat wanted him to work on behalf of the nation's nuclear program. However, he was accidentally put into prison by another Soviet officer who did not know about his special skills. As a consequence, he was sent into the Gulag. It took over a year, until his whereabouts could be tracked. As a dispelled non-free citizen he started working in the secret city Chelyabinsk-70 doing research on the impact of radiation on living organisms. Although many nuclear scientists involved in program were

de jure prisoners, the academic freedom in those secret prisons was much larger than elsewhere in the Soviet Union. While Mendel's theory of genetics was still de facto forbidden in the Soviet Union, Timofeev-Resovsky, who relied on it for his research, did not have to fear interference (Granin 2003).

In the circles of dispelled scientists an amount of personal freedom could be restored, as it was exceptional under Stalin's reign: „One has to remark that in these times nuclear physicist succeeded in liberating themselves [*raskrepostit'sya*]. Many of them already allowed themselves to go to work with unbuttoned shirts and without ties, they played ping-pong while being at work, let themselves inspire by the outlawed genetics, they were not afraid of screaming at people in charge at a ministry.” (Granin 2003: 246).

Beria pressed to produce the first Soviet nuclear bomb in time for the public celebration of Stalin's birthday in 1949. Environmental and health concerns were entirely neglected. People testified that they produced plutonium by their own hands (Kutepova 2017). The need to deal with nuclear waste was entirely ignored. Nuclear waste was simply dumped into the river Techa. From 1948 until at least 1952 a radiation dose of several million Curie was filled into the river which was still used as source for drinking water. It affected many ecological systems in the eastern Ural region, as the river Techa flows into other rivers that finally flow into the Arctic Sea. After widespread health problems among the people living on the riverside were remarked, 23.000 people were relocated from the area. The health hazards of this high amounts of radiation cannot be clearly seen in statistics. Many people from the area that died from leukemia were not registered as such. Deaths were often registered as either car accidents or suicides. This practice of dumping nuclear waste into open ecosystems cannot be blamed to a lack of knowledge on the material's danger. Those dangers were more or less well-studied at the time. Therefore, it must be considered as conscious irresponsibility, as Shores Medvedev states (Medvedev 2017: 154-157).

On September 29th 1957, a major nuclear accident occurred in Chelyabinsk-40. It counts as the third biggest nuclear disaster in history after Chernobyl 1986 and Fukushima 2011. A container of nuclear waste exploded, after the cooling system was shut down due to radioactive contamination of the cooling water. The explosion set free some special light phenomena on the night sky that could be seen even in the city of Chelyabinsk (Medvedev 2017: 136-146). Authorities kept it secret, but it was impossible to hide it completely. Immediately after the accident, hospitals in Chelyabinsk and Sverdlovsk (the present-day Yekaterinburg) were crowded with radiation victims. The event could not be hidden away from all the soldiers who liquidated the waste site after the blast, although they were urged to never talk about this mission. The food production in the Ural was shut down, products

were thrown away. People in the region had to stand in line to receive food which led to protests and demands for explanation (Medvedev 2017: 177-179).

Under secrecy the Soviet leadership established research centers in the region in order to examine biological life in a highly radiated environment and to research health hazards of radiation. In the late 1950s and in the 1960s, most of this research was classified. Scientists worked in isolation from the scientific community. Their contact to the outside world was subject to strong regulations. Nevertheless, it did not remain beyond the grasp of the larger Soviet scientific community what kind of research was done in Chelyabinskaya Oblast'. At some point, it was allowed to publish academic papers based on radiation data collected in the Chelyabinsk area, if those papers passed censorship. In cooperation with censors, scientists covered up where exactly their research data originated. In the 1970s the Soviet biologist Zhores Medvedev, forced into exile in 1973, tried to prove that the event really happened. Therefore, he reviewed the Soviet Scientific literature on radiated wildlife. By doing this, he found an unnamed highly radiated territory appearing again and again in Soviet radiation studies. He could exclude that it is an artificially built territory. By summing up the described circumstances of the area, he gained good confidence to claim that it is located in the Ural (Medvedev 2017: 19-49). Medvedev's work became a milestone in the discussion on ecological damage of the Soviet industrial policy.

In the wake of perestroika, the Soviet authorities officially confirmed the accident. In the 1990s, the causes and the legacy of the blast were widely debated and gradually reconstructed by nuclear scientists such as Zhores Medvedev, Vladislav Larin and Vladimir Kuznetsov (Lavrin 1999). An estimated number of 10.000 liquidators worked in the immediate aftermath of the disaster in order to contain the radiated area. It is not entirely clear how these liquidators' health was affected in the aftermath (Medvedev 2017: 157).

The legacy of nuclear contamination has further consequences on Chelyabinsk until today. It contributes to the region's relative shortage of high-quality drinking water because water sources close to Ozersk cannot be used. This does not concern the river Techa alone. The city's area also includes the highly polluted lake Karachai. That lake is said to cause the Eastern Ural Radiation Trace [Vostochno-uralskiy radioaktivnyy sled]. That means that the lake's radiation constantly spreads in the whole region because of birds fishing in the water and the moor surrounding it. It is not entirely clear how long the state-owned Russian nuclear energy corporation Rosatom struggled to build a confinement for lake Karachai. A source of the US secret service CIA claims that as early as the 1960s camp prisoners convicted to long sentences were sent there to build walls around the lake with poor technical means. Those prisoners were supposedly detained in a camp isolated from the city. They were called

nasmertniki, which freely translates as die-sooners (Medvedev 2017: 151-154). Officially, this construction project began in 1986. In order to disconnect the lake from the groundwater, it had to be surrounded entirely by concrete. Like the sarcophagus in Chernobyl, this is a huge technological challenge and very expensive. It was completed in 2015.

Since the 1990's, the existence of the city that today is called Ozersk is officially confirmed, but it remains closed. Only people who are registered in the city can enter it. The industrial complex still produces nuclear weapon systems. As a consequence, the secret service still pays special attention to it. The industrial complex has become slightly less secret. In recent years, it shared records of former employees with scientists to do research on the long-term effects of radiation (see for example N.A. Koshurnikova et al. 1999). Today Chelyabinskaya Oblast' tries to preserve the memory of the catastrophe. The state archive collects written memories of former liquidators that worked on the blast site (Bochkareva et al. 2016) The state company Rosatom has also established a society council [obshchestvennyy sovet], an institutionalised forum where environmental experts and civil activists can make their voices heard in front of the company's leadership.

In 1999, the human rights organisation Planet of Hope [planeta nadezhd] emerged in Ozersk. It played an important role in making public several accidents in the radio-chemical factories. Its members shed light on major accidents in 2007 and 2017 the factory management tried to hide. Ozersk has a high rate of cancer cases. Occasionally, a causal link between the cancer and nuclear radiation can be scientifically established. In some of these cases, human rights lawyers assisted local citizens in going to court seeking for reparation. As Ozersk is particularly protected in the name of national security, it is easier to control and repress civic activism. In 2004, the FSB banned sociological research in the city. According to information gathered by environmental activists, the Mayak factories have a special payment system rewarding employees for being silent about critical incidents. If employees do not report breakdowns, they receive bonuses every month – an incentive to shy away from being on alert. Even though it is not publicly known how this reward system works in detail, it can be seen as a measure to suppress critical information. In 2015, Political and economic elites worked together with law enforcement authorities in order to dissolve civic activism in the city almost entirely. Planeta Nadezhd was registered as a foreign agent. Moreover, the federal state TV-channel Rossiya24 published reports in which Nadezhda Kutepova, the head of Planeta Nadezhd, was suspected of spying. Fearing immediate arrest and persecution, she immediately left the country (Kutepova 2017). The discrediting campaign against her echoes methods from the Stalin era when people were publicly accused of similar crimes: either of

spying or of organized wrecking on behalf of enemy nations. Especially in industrial monocities, such campaigns were widespread and made large circles (Kotkin 1995: 334).

### **3.1.3 The region's ecological burden caused by copper mining**

The city Karabash is located in the north west of Chelyabinskaya Oblast'. As of January 2020, one of two active copper mines in the Oblast' is located in Karabash. The city reveals a huge ecological burden. People often mention it as a symbol for the ecological catastrophes in the region. In the 1980s leaves fell as early as in summer due to the air pollution coming from the mine, from the refinery and from the mountains of toxic waste that encircle the whole city. In 1989 the factory was closed due to bankruptcy. As the copper factory was the only relevant employer, nearly all 50.000 inhabitants left the city. In 1997 the mine was reopened. It is now part of RMK's portfolio (Kustikova 2017a).

The city centre is surrounded by gigantic mining waste dumps, black mountains that are almost half as high as the natural mountains in the area, as I saw when I visited the city in March 2019. The toxic dust that comes from those waste mountains remains a significant ecological hazard. After the bankruptcy of the state-owned copper mine, the new owners did not need to purchase the waste mountains that were accumulated in decades of mining. The local authorities are responsible for large parts of the waste mountains. Thus, the company cannot be made accountable to contain the ecological catastrophe (Blov 2018: 143). In a very modest scale, RMK plants trees, grass and greenery on them in an effort to prevent toxic dust to spread in the city. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the hillsides are simply black. The city's urban order is similar to Magnitogorsk. Mine and factory are located right in the center. A straight alley, the Ural Liberation Street, runs parallel to the factory's territory. This road was once supposed to be the pride of the city, the centre of proletarian life. Next to the entry to the factory are the ruins of a cinema, not far away there is a public bath house. In front of an artificial lake that covered by black and grey ice, when I visited the city, there is small tribune where party apparatchiks used to take the salute of parades. Along this former main road, children use ruins of former houses and administration buildings as playgrounds. Many empty houses have been burnt down to ashes. Most of today's 11.000 inhabitants live in small wooden houses located somewhere between the factory and the waste dumps. Most of the streets are located at the foot of black mining dump hills in grey landscape. In terms of architecture, the industrial mono-city looks like a poor village. Public infrastructure is weak. The police unit and a facility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – surrounded by fences and netting wire – count to the biggest buildings and to the modest number of stonewalled buildings.



And yet there is also a public library, a local online media outlet called “The Karabash Worker” that reports on pollution caused by the copper factory. There is a hotel attracting guests who go hunting and hiking in the mountains nearby.

Since the early 2000s the regional ministry of ecology published pollution data stating that the factory’s pollution is steadily decreasing. A paper published by North American scientists in 2016 suggested the opposite. The scientists used pollution data obtained by NASA satellites to track unknown sources of sulfur dioxide pollution. In Russia, they discovered three high-scale industrial sources of air pollution that were undeclared so far; one of them is the Karabash copper mine. With the help of satellites scientists received estimated pollution data that were seven to ten times higher than the official data released by the Chelyabinsk’s ministry of environmental affairs (Gorkavyy 2016; McLinden et al. 2016). This officially undetected amount of pollution leads environmentally sensitive citizens to further distrust the regional government in its official estimations on health hazards of industrial projects. It increases and strengthens opposition against new copper mines. In the past, StopGOK activists also made an educational trip to Karabash. It serves as a negative image; it is the incarnation of the object people want to prevent in the outskirts of Chelyabinsk.

What can be learnt out of the area’s complex environmental history? The significant air pollution in Magnitogorsk, the complex radiation heritage in Ozersk and the black waste mountains of Karabash account for an aspect of the Soviet Union’s characteristic economic policy that significantly contributed to the country’s collapse: an unconditional focus on the promotion of heavy industry (Kornai 1992: 383-386; Peterson 1993: 19-23; Allen 2001). People in Southern Ural suffer until today from the consequences of continuous reckless exploitation of the heavy industry’s resources. Yet the industry and also the heritage of environmental pollution in the region create a need for scientific and legal experts in the region. There is a need for the experts that know how to contain the consequences of the bad decisions of the past. These experts became an important resource for civic protests against the copper mine. Chelyabinsk itself is an industrial city; the city’s class of engineers, chemists, geologists, hydrologists – today’s version of nuclear scientists playing pingpong and defying Stalinist rule – as well as lawyers specialised on environmental law are a crucial resource for the movement. It was built around technical experts, such as Andrey Talevlin, Yuriy Cherkasov, Nadezhda Vertyakhovskaya, Sergey Denisov, Sergey Belogorokhov who can comment on the ecological consequences of Tominskiy GOK in a scientifically sophisticated manner.

### **3.2 The origins of privately orchestrated violence**

Almost all forms of repressions that are going to be discussed in this study reveal a close collaboration between private entrepreneurs and law enforcement officials. The origins of this tight collaboration can be found in the Soviet Union's economic crisis in the 1980s and the emergence of the free market economy. The particular forms of repression exposed in this study cannot be understood without considering this historical context. An insightful account on those processes is provided by Vadim Volkov in his study on violent entrepreneurship [silovoe predprinimatel'stvo, 2002]. Volkov analyses the role of organised crime and private security firms in the formation of Russia's free market economy. Violence entrepreneurs, Volkov argues, were filling a void that would actually have to be fulfilled by the state. His analysis starts by tracing back the origins of organised crime. According to data from the Russian anti-corruption police, most of the caught criminals were men born between 1965 and 1970. They finished their military service when Gorbachev's reforms already allowed free trade. Jobs in the traditional state socialist economy were badly paid; traditional Soviet career paths did not work out anymore. Working in a criminal group, "offering protection" to small market agents, i.e. blackmailing them, was more attractive (Volkov 2002: 16-18).

One important origin of criminal groups were sports clubs, especially martial arts. In the Soviet Union before Perestroika, professional athletes had a privileged life. Many of them worked as officials in the military or in the defense ministry, as the main sport clubs "Dinamo" and "SKA" were attached to the KGB and the army. With the Soviet Union falling apart those secure jobs disappeared. Groups of men who knew each other well and who were well experienced in using physical force had to find new jobs. As they already had a network built up in sports, it became an option to start up criminal groups. Something similar holds true for Afghanistan war veterans. They returned from the war in groups and without a promising career perspective, but highly experienced in using violence (Volkov 2002: 19-32). Among a pool of competing gangs, criminal groups earned money by convincing businesses that they could protect companies from being blackmailed by other criminal groups. They also chased unpaid debts and put pressure on debtors.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the implementation of the 100-day-program introducing the free market economy, the need for violence entrepreneurs rapidly increased. Markets were growing and the privatisation of state enterprises expanded. This eventually led to a rise in the number of conflicts between market actors. During the emergence of the free market, the Russian state could not fulfill some of his essential tasks. The free market

economy was implemented in such a velocity that there was no time to adapt laws regulating market competition. That led to many conflicts among entrepreneurs the state could not resolve, as there were no clear legal grounds to manage those conflicts; fraudulent bankruptcy and insider trading were not explicitly illegal until 1997 (Favarel-Garrigues 2011: 168). If businesses were deceived by such practices, they could not rely on courts to undo their damages. The study *Policing Economic Crime* (2011) by Gilles Favarel Garrigues exposes many examples of treacherous, but legal market practices:

An export business for example, could purchase raw materials at the local market price [*that was highly state-subsidised, often cheaper than the production costs, L.L.*], persuade an official to grant an export license and then sell the commodity at the going price on the world. This method was particularly widespread in the Ural [...]. (Favarel-Garrigues 2011: 115)

He quotes a Soviet entrepreneur proudly revealing his strategy of creating legal loopholes:

“When we founded ‘Interquado’, there was no law on joint-ventures. When we turned it into a limited company, officials had no idea what that meant. To be ahead of one’s time: that’s what enterprise means.” (Favarel-Garrigues 2011: 119)

To businesses, it was much cheaper and more effective to rely on trustful violence entrepreneurs than to rely on the state. Law enforcement services and the judiciary branch were often unable to protect them from bandits or from betraying market actors.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, organised crime was increasingly challenged by private security firms. An important step to solve the problem of informal protection was made unintentionally in 1992. After the failed coup attempt against Gorbachev in August 1991, Russia’s president Yeltsin feared that something similar could happen to him. In order to weaken the security apparatus, he split up the Soviet Security service KGB into several agencies. By 1995, 14 competing institutions were in charge of security and intelligence (Volkov 2002: 189). Thousands of intelligence service employees [siloviki] were dismissed. In order to offer an alternative job perspective to those dismissed agents, Yeltsin legalised private security firms. About 50.000 former security service and law enforcement agents were hired by private security companies. Especially secret service agents became important actors on the market. About 2.000 former KGB officials were even running security firms. For a few years, it was even explicitly legalised that acting security service officials could work as consultants to private companies. All this led to less visible, more professional forms of private violence. Many firms were founded by former security service officials working with security service methods. First, they gathered information about all market actors in order to be able to tell their clients whether they are reliable business partners or not. As they mostly had personal ties to courts and law enforcement system, Siloviki had the connections

to make the justice system work in favour of their clients (Volkov 2002: 185-197). This illustrates an example from Favarel-Garrigues's study:

The most common practices involved using contacts inside the administration to monopolise access to information, sideline competitors or obtain unwarranted advantages. I personally attended three auctions at which shops were sold off, all of which were characterised by a flagrant disregard for procedure [...]. The third was attended by several bidders, one of whom, surrounded by scowling bodyguards, persuaded his rivals to withdraw. (Favarel-Garrigues 2011: 243)

This shows two main resources FSB agents can offer to entrepreneurs: access to professionalised violence and access to secret information inside state authorities. In the Soviet Union, a central task of the FSB was to control the entire bureaucracy and to keep as much information on it as possible. Therefore, former security service officials can help to manipulate such biddings. They most probably know how and whom to bribe.

The copper industry plays an important part in the history of violent entrepreneurship in the Ural. Volkov's book contains a brief case study on the criminal group Uralmash that is said to have controlled more than 200 enterprises in the Ural region in the 1990s. The group managed to keep control over the machine construction factory "Uralmash" when the company defaulted in 1991. After regular and intense street battles and shootings in the early 1990s, Uralmash controlled more than 200 companies and 12 banks in Yekaterinburg. The group foresaw the changes in the sphere of violent entrepreneurship and adapted early. It invested its gains into private security firms, thus legalising its assets step by step. Furthermore, it founded a political movement, donated to election campaigns of the Sverdlovsk governor Eduard Rossel' and to Yeltsin's reelection campaign in 1996. At least since 1993, it tried to create an image of itself as a civilised force that will strengthen democracy in Yekaterinburg. As a consequence, Uralmash authorities could uphold their influence. Probably, Yekaterinburg's leading organised crime group is tied to Russian Copper Company (RMK) [Russkaya Mednaya Kompaniya], created in 2004. RMK is the holding company of ZAO Tominskiy GOK responsible for the mining in the outskirts of Chelyabinsk. This can be concluded out of the fact that Uralmash's most important economic assets was the copper processing business, as Volkov reveals referring to FSB reports (Volkov 2002: 174-179).

The connection between Uralmash and RMK is still in need for explanation. Igor Altushkin, the founder and majority owner of RMK, is rather discreet about his biography. According to information shared in the media, he was born in 1970, which makes him part of the generation that was most involved in organised crime in the 1990s. He is known as a major

donor to the Orthodox church and to martial arts clubs. He opened his first metallurgical business in 1992 in Yekaterinburg. The early start of his entrepreneurial career, his year of birth and his reported affinity to martial arts make it plausible to assume that he had some ties to Uralmash and to organised crime, even though direct evidence is scarce. Undoubtedly, the practices of Uralmash – the investments into private security firms, manipulative PR efforts and the use of violence – foreshadow the techniques RMK will use in its conflict with StopGOK.

Another important takeaway from Volkov's study: Private security firms were particularly widespread in Chelyabinsk. 150 firms were registered in 1997. That is three times as much as in Nizhny Novgorod, a town of similar size (Volkov 2002: 198). The numbers hardly surprise, as Chelyabinsk is a centre of economic activity. The fall of the Soviet Union meant also a major downgrade for security service activity. Magnitogorsk lost its status as a closed area, Ozersk was transformed from a secret city, an officially non-existent spot, to a closed city. This probably entailed that many special agents were dismissed at the time; this created a large amount of potential employees.

Volkov comments that the privatisation of security services de facto equalled a confession that the state's monopoly on violence fragmented (Volkov 2002: 217). A crack in the state's monopoly on power exists until today in the Urals, as the following chapters will show. Even though some particularities of the legislation on private security firms have changed in the meantime, it can be assumed that the playbooks of KGB and FSB had a big influence on corporate identities and corporate practices. Presumably, this influence keeps on persisting. The chapters 4 and 5 will show evidence that RMK might still use services similar to the ones provided by private security firms with close connections to law enforcement institutions. Media occasionally report on the hidden wealth of siloviki, e.g. on second-rank officials owning real estate in the European Union (Shmagun et al. 2019; Markhovskaya et al. 2019) make it plausible to assume that silovki still offer services to private companies. Moreover, FSB officers have – in some cases – the right to retire between the age of 40 and 45; whereas the exact retirement rules for them are undisclosed (Khachaturov 2018). This young retirement age incentivises looking for follow-up jobs in the private sector. Since a few years, the private market for violence in Russia is growing again, as investigative journalists revealed. This market profits from the growing amount of war experienced soldiers fighting in Ukraine and in Syria. Agents, most of them apparently based in Saint Petersburg, offer to connect those war-experienced strongmen with politicians or businesses that want to repress opponents (Yapparova 2019).

As this chapter has shown, entrepreneurs do not only make use of privatised security and intelligence services in order to repress social movements opposing them. It is also a useful asset to gain inside knowledge on administrative bodies and state authorities. The copper mining business largely depends on successful interactions with state authorities. In order to open up a mine, an entrepreneur needs to purchase land, receive licenses and conduct sociological reviews. Inside knowledge on the decision-making processes within the state authorities simplifies all those processes.

### **3.3 Brief summarising history of the StopGOK movement**

In 2012, plans to build a copper mine on the margins of Chelyabinsk became public. At this point, Chelyabinsk already had a community sensitive to ecological topics. It was a central spot of Russia's critical societal expertise on nuclear policy. In 2010, a movement was built in order to prevent plans to build a road through the city's forest. When experts heard about the plans, they started fighting for transparency. They forced RMK to make their exact plans public. 20km away from Chelyabinsk's city centre two open mining pits – 500m and 300m deep – are supposed to be dug. One of the biggest concerns of environmentalists is the impact on Chelyabinsk water reserves. The mining process will demand huge quantities of water, which is already rare in the city. Furthermore, the mine will set free toxic sulfur dioxide dust that affects Chelyabinsk air and water quality, especially the quality of Chelyabinsk's single water reserve located only a few kilometres away from the mine. Sulfur dioxide dust causes heart and lung diseases. It can have a poisoning effect still dozens of kilometres away from its origin. In Murmanskaya Oblast' in 2017, copper mining caused 100 cases of polluted water on 16 different waterbodies (Raznikova 2019: 16).

Furthermore, the holes of the copper mine complex are only a few kilometres away. The holes can exert influence on the territory's tectonic equilibrium. The mechanical digging can cause cracks and splits under the water reservoir. Through those splits the water reservoir could drain. This would deprive three water preparation factories of water.

When the project became public, activists from Chelyabinsk spent their weekends agitating in the villages closest to future construction site. A social movement against the copper mine emerged. It went by the name StopGOK; GOK meaning Gorno-Obogatitel'nyy Kombinat – a factory site that combines a copper mine and a processing plant.

Local experts reviewed those parts of RMK's project documentation they had access to. Coordinated by StopGOK activists, more than 4.000 people filed a collective lawsuit against the construction plans. Before the regional elections in autumn 2014, governor Dubrovskiy

stopped the project temporarily. He ordered a separate ecological audit at a university in Yekaterinburg that was finished in 2016.

In 2015, the NGO For Nature [Za Prirodu] that coordinated a lot of StopGOK efforts in court was declared a foreign agent. As such, the organisation was regularly fined and finally liquidated.

Nevertheless, StopGOK's support was constantly growing. According to an opinion poll from 2016 conducted by the state-controlled Russian Public Opinion Research Center, the majority of Chelyabinsk's citizens opposed the construction of the copper mining complex near Tomino and Tominskiy.

In June 2017, the construction of the copper mining complex near Tomino started. StopGOK activists considered this construction as illegal as the courts have not finally decided on the project's lawfulness. They called the police but could not stop the forest clearances in the area. Activists tried to occupy the forest designated to be the copper mine complex' construction site. Those efforts failed. Private security staff showed up, destroyed the tents, attacked activists and chased them away from the territory. From this point on, violence entrepreneurs – some of them war-experienced soldiers – regularly threaten and intimidate StopGOK activists coming close to the territory. Criminal charges against activists were raised. But so far, as of January 2020, no StopGOK activist has been convicted.

A key strategy of social movements based in the Russian hinterland is trying to attract Moscow's attention, especially the attention of the presidential administration. Scientific experts connected to StopGOK were regularly traveling to Moscow in order to talk to the direction of the Nature Protection Agency. The topic was brought up in the Presidential Council for Human Rights and in a meeting of Putin with Yavlinskiy, head of the liberal party Yabloko. Chelyabinsk's regional political elite has been found either unwilling or unable to support the movement's demand. In 2017, Putin headed to his reelection. Environmentalists hoped that he could turn down the project as an act to appeal to voters. When Putin came to Chelyabinsk in November 2017, the conflict was in its most undecided stage, which also drastically increased the level of repressions. Activists who wanted to stand in picketing points at that day were blocked from leaving their car by law enforcement officials. At the same night, Vassiliy Moskovets, one of the StopGOK's unofficial leaders, was surprisingly called by Vladimir Putin. Putin explained to Moskovets that he read their petition. He claimed to share their worry. He announced a change in legislation that would undermine RMK's strategy to seek legal approve for the construction project. For social movements, it is difficult to say how they can achieve their goals. Being legally right or even winning in court often does not equal with winning the fight. Decision-making within

Russia's political and economic elite is often too opaque. Outsiders often do not know how to exert influence on it. But receiving a call from Putin can mostly count as a strong asset, as Russia's dictatorship is highly personalistic. Indeed, Putin's words sounded promising. But StopGOK was cheated. The law promised by Putin was established. However, it was enacted only from the beginning of 2019. RMK finished the approval processes for the copper mine in 2018 (Kustikova 2018).

In 2019, StopGOK activists tried to run for the Chelyabinsk City council. From 2014 to 2019, the council was completely dominated by United Russia. StopGOK had no allies within the legislative power. Many candidates, publicly known as figures of StopGOK, were not registered to the vote. Due to a complicated voting system, no candidate of the non-systemic opposition made into the City Council.

The mine will probably be opened at some point in 2020.

At least, StopGOK succeeded in increasing the costs of RMK to build the copper mining complex. Due to their pressure, work at the mine was at least delayed for some years. StopGOK has also fostered an increase of civic engagement in the city in various spheres. Thus, it developed from a social movement to a city movement in the sense of Clément (Clément et al. 2013: 14). Many StopGOK activists started to be active in the movement "Chelyabinsk, Breathe!" fighting against air pollution mainly caused by Chelyabinsk metallurgical factories. Activists from both movements share experiences among each other. While being committed to the StopGOK movement, citizens also became inspired to join protests against the Putin regime organised by Naval'nyy supporters.

## **4 Channelling protest**

### **4.1 The primary repressive means in environmental conflicts: hiding information**

#### **4.1.1 StopGOK's fight for information**

The first repressive measures against citizens' protests took place before the social movement StopGOK emerged. Officials and business elites tried to undermine protests against the copper mine by simply being silent about it, by keeping secret as much information as possible. Chelyabinsk's urban society first heard about the construction project in 2013. This happened by pure chance. In the following, they had to sue ZAO Tomniskiy GOK to receive the detailed construction plans.

The closest village to the future construction sites is Tominskiy, around 20 km away from Chelyabinsk's city centre. In Tominskiy and other villages nearby, RMK presented the construction project in public hearings, as required by the law. Except for the villagers,



nobody knew about those hearings. Thus, no environmental experts and no oppositional politicians were present. The eighty persons that were present at the first hearing in 2012, overwhelmingly consisted of local villagers. One villager was a member of the liberal oppositional party Yabloko. He forwarded information on the copper mine to his party colleagues in the region's capital.

Yabloko is neither represented in the city council, nor in the Oblast' parliament. But it has environmental experts in their rows. Andrey Talevlin is one of them. He teaches environmental law at Chelyabinsk State University. Furthermore, he is a member in the societal council of Rosatom, an institution that allows civil society representatives to raise critique on the company's environmental policy. Talevlin also runs an environmental advocacy NGO called For Nature [Za Prirodu]. As an experienced legal expert, he knew what could be done to stop the mine. He got in touch with local journalists to spread information. In December 2013, For Nature hosted a public hearing on the copper mine project with the expertise of independent engineers.

The association continued to gather scientific expertise on the environmental impacts of the proposed copper mine. Different documents required legal battles in court. One of the most remarkable conflicts evolved around the detailed project documentation [proektnaya dokumentatsiya], a document that would have been needed in order to provide a scientific expertise with a bigger value in court. By law, ZAO Tominskiy GOK was obliged to provide it. The association sued ZAO Tominskiy GOK asking the company to publicly release it. Although, in January 2016, a court ultimately ruled in favour of StopGOK, this did not work out. The mining company refused to follow the ruling. A brief criminal investigation against Tominskiy GOK's director was opened up for perversion of justice, but quickly terminated. The documents have still not been released (Kustikova 2017b).

Environmentalists accuse RMK and the state officials who conducted the expertise of using a legal loophole. There has never been a study on the ecological complex as a whole. Instead, six different ecological professional evaluations on isolated parts of the complex were drafted. Activists could only enforce the release of two ecological studies provided by the state. Activists with geological and chemical expertise approached the Russian nature protection agency Rosprirodnadzor who conducted the research in order to demand the publication of all available information. The agency is a centralist organ whose leadership is based in Moscow. Activists presented their doubts on the conducted studies twice in the agency's Moscow headquarters. Rosprirodnadzor officials recommended they go to court.

Nadezhda Vertyakhovskaya, technological expert sympathising with StopGOK, had the chance to read some of the unreleased studies. She accuses RMK of having provided false data for the expertise. The dangers could be underestimated in official state evaluations. There has never been an officially commissioned expertise on the impact of the copper mine on Chelyabinsk's water reservoir, as Vertyakhovskaya emphasises in a correspondence via Facebook in November 2019.

#### **4.1.2 The legal basis for discussions on ecological risks**

Legal standards for the organisation of public hearings are defined in the executive order N372 written by the State Committee on Environment Protection [prikaz N 372 Goskomekologii RF]. The ten-page document leaves many ambiguities that favour the builder of a facility with a major ecological impact.

The degree of transparency does not only depend on the company itself. The first part of the executive order regulates that the process of studying ecological and social impacts of an intended construction project needs to be coordinated with the local city administration and with the responsible Nature Protection Agencies. That means, an important reason for the lack of transparency can be seen in the lack of political competition on the local and regional levels in Russia. In a more competitive political environment, the work of local administrations and state agencies would be better controlled by oppositional deputies who must be granted information on decision-making processes within the executive branch. In Chelyabinsk this lack of political competition is prominently fostered by the abolition of mayoral elections. Chelyabinsk's mayor is appointed by a commission which is appointed by the governor of Chelyabinskaya Oblast<sup>4</sup>.

Chelyabinsk's city council is elected in two steps. The "Chelyabinsk law on municipal elections" requires independent candidates to collect signatures from 0,5 percent of the registered voters in the electoral district.<sup>2</sup> Municipal constituencies vote for municipal deputies in a first-past-the-post voting that represent a certain city district [rayon]. Each district elects seven deputies for the city council (see "rules of the Chelyabinsk city council" §1.3).<sup>3</sup> This two-step system favours Russia's ruling party as it requires a broad institutional base for election victories. By a majority among municipal representatives, access to the city council can be refused to popular opposition politicians. Oppositional groups are too severely

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<sup>2</sup> See §22 of the Chelyabinsk election law: <http://chelyabinsk.izbirkom.ru/vybory-i-referendумы/vib2019/oms2019/zak/> (accessed 15 February 2020)

<sup>3</sup> Available online at: <http://www.chelduma.ru/reglament-chelyabinskoy-gorodskoy-dumy> (accessed 15 February 2020)

subjected to repression, before they would manage to gain an institutional base large enough to make them competitive.

When oppositional candidates all over Russia won regional and local elections in 2013, the system was made less accessible to system outsiders. Candidates were obliged to collect a large numbers of signatures among their constituents in order to take part in an election. The number of the needed signatures was significantly increased after 2013. For regional parliamentary elections, signatures of 3 percent of citizens registered in a constituency have to be collected (Kynev et al. 2019: 11). In order to collect those signatures, independent candidates often need to work with a big professionalised supporter staff. Only if candidates run under the protection of the power vertical, they can be sure to fulfill all bureaucratic requirements.

Order N372 requires that a construction project with ecological impact must be announced in an official gazette published by the local administration (according to segment 4.3), whereas spreading information on the construction project in media outlets or in the internet is optional (segment 4.4). A technical and scientific report on the project must be accessible to citizens for 30 days (segment 4.10), leaving the possibility for hiding it again after those thirty days. Citizens can voice concerns on the construction project. Those concerns have to be documented. This gives many opportunities to undermine the accessibility of information. In the extensiveness of Russian territory, it is uncertain that information published and announced in a small village will reach independent environmental experts. There is no central register of public hearings taking place in Russia. The environmental advocacy group Bellona tries to track as many public hearings as possible. That only works with the support of grassroots activists. Their record shows that technical and scientific reports are most often not provided in electronic form.<sup>4</sup> The company planning the construction site is free to decide whether they want to organise a survey, a referendum or public hearings (segment 4.3). Decisions made during the public hearings must be written down in the protocol (4.8). From the builder's perspective, organising public hearings is the most convenient option. It gives the builder the possibility to control discussions. In practice, the location of the hearings for a contested project is often crowded by ardent supporters of the project that are suspected to be on the builder's payroll (Tarasov 2019b; Kustikova 2017b).

Another problem concerns the weakness of the Russian nature protection agency Rosprirodnadzor. As exposed by Ivan Blokov in a recent study on environmental protection

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<sup>4</sup> Bellona's records are available online at <https://bellona.ru/obzor-slushaniy/> (accessed 07 Dec 2019)

that is based on his field experience as a Greenpeace employee. The weakness of Rosprirodnadzor lies in its lacking autonomy, as well as in its small budget. He describes that “logic arguments work less and less” inside the agency (Blokov 2018: 275). Instead of that, according to Blokov’s experiences, decisions are often made based on the influence of important cabinet members of the federal government regardless of their portfolio. Blokov has also experienced that industrial businesses have channels to make themselves heard inside the agency; their interests are taken seriously (Blokov 2018: 275-276).

If Rosprirodnadzor did not thoroughly check RMK’s aspirations to build a copper mine, an important cause might also have been its lack of personnel:

“One inspector of the federal nature protection institutions, according to the public register of objects having a negative impact on the environment, is responsible for 52 objects he needs to control. In addition to that, those inspectors have still other tasks: giving out licenses, organisation of ecological expertises. One also has to remark that their register keeps on expanding. From March 2017 to March 2018 the number of objects on the list increased by 200 percent.” (Blokov 2018: 295)

Keeping in mind that such an object can be an entire industrial plant, a mine or a wastesite, each having very different and complex environmental impacts and where each supervision requires very specific expertise, the task to check on 52 objects seems to be unrealisable to a single person. In Chelyabinsk the situation is far worse. According to a state report published by Chelyabinsk authorities in 2017, the Oblast’ has slightly less than 200,000 objects that are supposed to be checked. It has 28 inspectors for all those objects (Blokov 2018: 296).

The agency’s budget is poor. An average salary of a Rosprirodnadzor employee is about 40.000 rubles (about 600 Euro). The number of state officials in almost all kinds of its sectors has continuously risen in Russia since the consolidation of the Russian state in the late 1990s, especially the law enforcement services have multiplied. Conversely, the environment protection services have even slightly shrunk (Blokov 2018: 297).

This policy of hiding information can be analysed in the framework of repression theory as – in the words of Charles Tilly – it „increases a contender’s cost of action“. At first, it deprives civil activists of time. In a sphere that is full of deadlines defining when lawsuits against construction projects can be filed, time is a crucial resource. The later environmentalists discover a construction project they might want to oppose, the less chances they have to act against it. In some cases, construction projects are publicly discovered only when workers appear at the construction site (Golunov 2018; Girin 2018). Moreover, it

increases the costs as it requires expertise on the field of environmental law – a relatively rare resource in Russian civil society, as many of my interviewees emphasise.

The agents of the repressive measure are both local business elites (the management of RMK), as well as responsible state officials on the local and on the national level (the direction of Rosprirodnadzor). It cannot be entirely reconstructed who else has been taking part in preventing plans from becoming public. It is likely that the RMK management agreed on such a major industrial project with the Oblast's political leadership, at least on informal grounds.

As far as intent and effect of the repressive measure are concerned, it is best explained by the weakness model and by the political opportunity model. Based on the current environmental legislation, it is relatively easy to hide information if political and business elites are closely tied. Opposition is not presented in the Regional parliament and in the Chelyabinsk city parliament. Therefore, it is easy to prevent oppositional politicians from making requests to state agencies and to shed light on decision-making. The opportunity model can be plausibly applied because hiding information is clearly linked to the first stage of political conflicts. If it is not successful to prevent protest by suppressing information, actors most likely think about applying further methods.

#### **4.1.3 Excursus: fight for information in Krasnoyarsk**

As a primary feature of repressive policy, the suppression of information is applied in practically all environmental conflicts in present-day Russia. In an interview with Vladimir Chuprov who runs the energy program at Greenpeace taken on the 19th of February 2019 he explains that new oil drilling projects are often just announced in local print media outlets in the communities close to the drilling spots, which can be located far away in the subarctic Tundra. Thus, for Moscow-based environmental watchdogs, it is often impossible to detect newly planned projects, or it is due to pure chance. Eventually environmental activists often miss the time frame when it is still possible to fight against a new drilling project. The same can happen in the rather densely populated territory of Chelyabinskaya Oblast'. On the 25th of November 2019, the community of Chelyabinsk's environmentalists discovered that RMK plans to build yet another, a fourth copper mine in the region when Talevlin posted the information on his Facebook page. This was after the end of the 30 days during which interested citizens could have read the project documentation.

The strategy is prominently applied in conflicts about air pollution. This can be observed on the example of Krasnoyarsk. The city is home to one of the world's largest aluminium

production sites. The air is notoriously poisoned. In the late 1980s, inhabitants of villages close to the aluminium factory went on hunger strikes in front of the Krasnoyarsk party committee and demanded relocation (Tarasov 2019a). As late as in the wake of Glasnost' in the late 1980s, the Soviet Union installed compulsory surveillance systems that documented the contribution of distinct factories to air pollution (Peterson 1993: 21).

Until today, the regional government is reluctant to acknowledge air pollution as a problem. Krasnoyarsk's ministry for environmental affairs publishes live pollution data on its website [krasecology.ru](http://krasecology.ru). At first glance, the data looks useful and sophisticated as it discerns 28 different substances in the air that potentially cause health hazards and measures at 11 different stations.

However, it is not possible to download the data for free. For data collected throughout a year, the Krasnoyarsk governments charges about 200.000 rubles. This is a high price to pay for data, environmentalists actually distrust. The first struggle of environmentalists thus consists of forcing the government to acknowledge that the air in Krasnoyarsk is really poisoned. Krasnoyarsk's citizens perceive a high degree of air pollution. Smog and its intensified form called "Black Sky" are periodically visible in the air of Krasnoyarsk. Once in a while, if the city administration gives its permission, people take to the streets to protest against air pollution. But little can be achieved as long as the region's political leadership does not acknowledge the problem. Referring to a non-accessible set of data, politicians simply declare that the amount of air pollution is within the norms.

After a protest rally against air pollution on the 18th of March 2017, participants decided that they need to consolidate resistance to the government's negligent environmental policy. A group of people started building a network to measure air pollution. It is called Nebo Community [[nebo.community](http://nebo.community)], "nebo" meaning "sky".

I interviewed an activist of Nebo Community, Igor' Shpekht, on the 18th of March 2019. According to his explanations, the group started experimenting with different kinds of measuring devices and eventually succeeded in setting up a network of devices. Much of the technology is imported from China. When China started to bother about its air quality, it invested into new measuring technology. The prices for this technology dropped. Grassroots groups of environmentally concerned people can now afford this technology. For one device Nebo Community pays about 5.000 Rubles. This includes the measuring device and a small heating device that make it work in the cold Siberian Winter.

All data are broadcast on the website "nebo.live" and communicated on Instagram. In contrast to the data gathered by the ministry of ecology, Nebo Community's measuring devices can only discern one substance: particulate matter [tverdye chastitsy]. A substance

often produced in the process of burning. It contains nitrate and sulfate; it is a general indicator for air pollution, as it is produced by electricity plants based on coal, by transport and by heating devices.

The mere collection of independent information is met by the state with hostility. In several ways, regional authorities tried to stop the group from collecting and publishing data. Nebo Community was prevented from consolidating as a legal person. In order to do this, the authorities ordered that they need to register all measuring devices in a special register. The state agency demands 1 million rubles to register just one device. By building up this obstacle, the local government creates a reason not to acknowledge the independently gathered data. Responding to Nebo Community data, it simply states that the data are based on non-certified measuring technology. Explanatory power and informative value also depend on the position of the measuring devices. Nebo Community is not free to install them wherever they want as the state does not allow them to put devices on public land or on state buildings. They can only put devices on the private balconies of their supporters.

After Nebo Community started broadcasting data, the state tried to close the project entirely. Igor Shpekht, one of four initiators of the project, was sued for implementing a measuring system without license. In court, the lawsuit was rejected. As of January 2020, Nebo Community still exists.

In order to understand how seriously political elites take the fight for information, it has to be taken into account that the mere collection of data, as done by Nebo Community, is only a preliminary step in the process of producing politically and socially relevant information. It requires some expert knowledge to draw conclusions from the respective data. Nebo Community's data set allows to observe when the air quality is particularly bad; for instance, in which seasons of the year the air pollution increases. But it hardly allows to draw conclusions about what kind of industry is mainly responsible for pollution, as it does not single out any specific substances.

Nebo Community cooperates with a University in South Korea that analyses its data. Their conclusion is that the burning of coal is largely responsible for the Black Sky phenomena in Krasnoyarsk. This leaves many questions still unanswered as coal is either burnt in the city's most widespread heating systems and by the coal power plants in the outskirts of Krasnoyarsk.

Nebo Community has achieved some successes in the fight for information. Igor Shpekht explains that the ministry of ecology had no measuring stations installed in Krasnoyarsk's city centre. After Nebo Community started measuring the air quality, the government implemented more devices. Nevertheless, publicly accessible expertise on environmental

issues is rare in Krasnoyarsk. It is difficult to draw conclusions on how environmental policies need to change. It is difficult to determine responsibility of Krasnoyarsk's different factories – be it electricity production plants or metallurgical production sites. Citizens living close to the metallurgical factories suspect that their urban districts have higher cancer rates due to emissions coming from one of the world's largest aluminium factories. By law the Krasnoyarsk aluminum factory has to explain and justify its environmental policy in public hearings every seven years. The management has to lay out how they aspire to minimise ecological damage. Those public hearings are an opportunity for citizens to raise critique on the company and demand changes. As such, the hearings indicate what is publicly known about a company and what is not. The most recent hearings took place in October 2019. Concluding his impressions from those public hearings the Novaya Gazeta journalist Aleksey Tarasov writes: “During the hearings ‘Novaya’ is quoted many times: either [articles] on technology, on taxes, or on cancer rate statistics raised by us. The metallurgical representatives never knew what to answer or what to object. This is a terrible feeling – when the fate of a city is discussed based on newspaper articles, rather than on reports given by experts, scientists, engineers and physicians.” (Tarasov 2019b)

## **4.2 Exerting media control**

### **4.2.1 Independent local media**

Closely related to the strategy of suppressing information is the restriction of free media. In Chelyabinskaya Oblast' most of the local media are either owned directly by the state or they are owned by members of the political elite and thus also represent the government's point of view. Exceptions can occur in case of disagreements within the ruling elite. These disagreements are mainly represented in the form of smear campaigns against singled-out actors. For Chelyabinsk citizens without regular access to the internet, it seems impossible to get neutral and balanced news on their home region. On the 23th of July 2019, I interviewed Galina Gorina, a retired hair dresser engaged in the StopGOK movement. When I asked her to describe how she joined the StopGOK movement, she linked this indirectly to her access to the internet:

At first, I heard that laws are broken. [...] in the internet. At the beginning, I could not maturely deal with it. In 2010, I married a second time. We started learning to use computers together. He makes the technical work. I write posts and comments. In the internet, we started seeing what happens. If I walk on the streets, it was quite clear that there is a difference between reality and what they show in television. In 2015, I retired. My pension is 6.000 rubles per month. That is as much as I have to pay for the rent. I was diagnosed with Diabetes. That means, I need medication. But they did not have anything. Time after time, if you live through all this on your skin, you understand [...]. And more often and often I was reading up in the internet.



Irina Poletavkina, whom I interviewed on the 11th of March 2019, explains that in 2015 she purchased a dacha on Chelyabinsk's water reservoir, only a few kilometres away from the future construction site of the copper mine. At the time, the construction plans were already public for two years. The movement opposing the complex had gained strength and momentum already; thus the proposed copper mine would have been a question vital enough to make it to major local news. Yet Poletavkina had not heard about the construction project before she purchased the dacha. She is not reached by relevant news that concern a major personal investment and would likely have altered her decision to buy property. This illustrates that the media landscape in Chelyabinsk tends to report insufficiently on divisive issues.

Local newspapers in Chelyabinsk struggle to reach a state of economic independence. The city's most prestigious local daily newspaper Chelyabinsk Evening went bankrupt in 2016 and is since controlled by a government holding. Until 2017, there was an independent newspaper called Obzor which has been bought by the Chelyabinsk government. On March the 6th, I interviewed Vladimir Pisanov, a journalist and businessman in the media sphere, especially in the sphere of corporate publishing in Chelyabinsk. He explains that media outlets can only survive economically if they receive protection from an important economic or political actor. In order to receive this kind of protection, they must be available to represent this actor's points of view.

On March the 7th, I interviewed Mariya Shramenko, the editor-in-chief of the online news outlet 74.ru. She shares Pisanov's view on local media outlets' lacking independence. As the two exception she considers her own employer and Znak.com. 74.ru belongs to the Moscow-based media holding Hearst Shkulev Digital that owns several local news stations in the Russian Federation. The editorial board consists of 12 journalists. All of those editors have a certain focus, such as crime and justice. But portfolios are not strictly divided. The staff is so small that everybody has to cover all topics.

After reviewing 74.ru articles, it is fair to assume that 74.ru is relatively independent in its coverage. No significant local or national actor determines the editorial tendency. But 74.ru's small budget has an impact on the outlet's quality. The coverage on StopGOK and on the proposed copper mine, however, is fragmentary and incomplete. The site's archive does not contain all important ecological news in recent history.

Mariya Shramenko takes pride in the fact that 74.ru regularly criticises the local government. As an example, she mentions events in autumn 2018. The city was afflicted by a wave of steady smog. The local government could not remain as silent about it as in the winter before because it was facing an election. As the local government tried to react, it exposed its own

powerlessness: The minister for environmental affairs held a press conference on a waste dump claiming that it is mainly responsible for the current wave of air pollution, whereas it counts as most likely that the smog is caused by the city's metallurgical industry. During his appearance, he was asked why he would not rather talk at one of the city's metallurgical factories. He had to acknowledge that those companies are not obliged to let him enter their territory. Indeed, environmental protection agencies can only enter a company's territory with a prosecutor's permission. That complicates the management of spontaneously emerging ecological crises (Blov 2018: 397). 74.ru critically reported on the wave of pollution, as Shramenko remembers: "we quarrelled [rugat'sya] for two days with the government based on our reporting. Our governor attacked us very hard. That's how we live." Shramenko does not shy away from criticising regional elites. During the interview, she even dropped names of high-ranking regional officials she suspects of taking bribes

The site's coverage becomes more cautious regarding the federal government, Putin or the FSB. The outlet extensively covered the explosion of a building in Magnitogorsk on the 31st of December 2018. It questioned the event's official version given by Russian Law Enforcement Agencies. After Moscow-based independent media outlets reported that the explosion might have been caused by a terrorist attack, 74.ru also investigated and repeatedly criticised lacking transparency on the side of the Investigate Committee and the FSB. 74.ru was using its language more carefully than Moscow-based media – such as baza.io or Novaya Gazeta. For instance, it avoids using the word "terrorist attack" [terakt]. Being a local journalist in Chelyabinsk means to obey a set of unwritten rules and to an opaque regime of self-censorship; it is difficult and sometimes dangerous to balance the contradicting forces at play.

As far as 74.ru's coverage of environmental policy is concerned, Shramenko identifies two main obstacles. Firstly, resources are lacking. Secondly, industrial companies are not cooperative at all. Among the twelve members of the editorial board, nobody was in charge of the ecology portfolio at the time when I visited Chelyabinsk. Shramenko explained that she used to oversee it herself until her recent promotion. When being responsible for ecology, she had to deal with a lack of resources. For instance, she lacked useful background knowledge: "The topic is difficult as there are many nuances. All factories are different, with different technological processes and with different emissions. Some emissions might look horrible, grey and dark, but they do not necessarily cause extreme damage. There are also completely invisible and odourless substances which are much more dangerous than any others."

74.ru mostly covers political and economic affairs on a day-to-day basis. But they also publish longer articles from time to time. Shramenko says that she used to work on a bigger report on the state of the environment in the region. After two months of research – talking to oncologists, studying statistics – she abandoned the project. “I did not manage to develop a broad picture. I did not manage to find a story”, she explained.

As a journalist she mainly has to rely on data and knowledge that is publicly available. Her options to cover certain ecological topics are heavily restricted by the policy of suppressing information, as exposed in the previous chapter. In her experience “you meet a lot of resistance. Nobody likes that you talk about [environmental issues]”. She suspects relevant information behind closed doors:

There might be [a high rate of] several illnesses in our region, asthmatic or neurological illnesses. But I could not get access to those data. Maybe there are secret data somewhere. The big companies have their medical departments. All of their workers’ files are secret. It would be interesting to look into those files. But I simply could not get this insider information. And I did not want to cover something in a superficial way because I understand that not everything is that smooth. So far, I did not manage to grasp some kind of serious aspect.

According to her reporting experience, Chelyabinsk’s big companies behave in a largely “non-transparent” [zakrytyy] manner. They quickly answer to requests, but those answers are very short, they do not contain valuable information.

„To find out what happens there, is practically impossible. They do not invite to any serious factory inspections. They give comments very reluctantly. They do not implement any kind of transparent activity. They send press releases announcing some kind of record numbers. One metallurgical company once announced that they installed filters [on their chimneys]. A few months ago, another company announced that they were investing a lot of money to improve cleaning processes. But they are only saying this. Nobody can control them. Even some control agencies cannot enter the factories.“

Freedom of the press implies not only that journalists are not censored. It also implies that the state and socially relevant firms can be obliged to share relevant information. By refusing cooperation with journalists, companies can easily undermine free press coverage without using direct coercion. In an effort to put further pressure on Chelyabinsk’s industrial companies to release information, Shramenko used the same strategy that we see among activists: bringing the conflict to Moscow, competing for the attention of the Russian President (or at least the Presidential Administration). In the Winter 2017/2018, the smog in the city was particularly perceivable. Shramenko was present at a public performance of Vladimir Putin at a media forum in Kaliningrad on the 2nd of March 2018. Shramenko was given the opportunity to ask a question:

„When people walk on the streets, they cover their noses with scarfs because of sharp smells. In kindergartens, walk-outs with children are cancelled. We do not open the window. Otherwise, our apartments would turn to gas chambers [...]. Industrial companies have installed filters to clean up their emissions. But they only turn them on the days of your visits. And there is yet

another nuance, if you allow. In the last five years, emission quotas increase and increase in some magic way. That means, at the moment they only emit half of what they would be legally allowed to [...]. As a consequence, we have an ecological catastrophe. People are escaping from a contemporary megacity. The regional political leadership [vlast'] and law enforcement agencies take a passive stand on it, they justify this by the lack of real instruments to act and implement some kind of pseudo-measures. The question is the following: How to find solutions with industrialists? Who should do this and how?"<sup>5</sup>

Putin answered that it would not have come to his mind that filters are only used during his presence. He promised that he would look into the matter. Shramenko's appearance was aired in the state-funded regional news channel Rossiya1 Yushno-Ural'skiy, although the TV-channel skipped Shramenko's rather drastic description of the city's air pollution. As a consequence, she was called by the press agent of the company Chelyabinsk Metallurgicheskiy Kombinat. She recalls that he was infuriated. He blamed her that she would understand nothing about industrial processes but admitted to have not explained the company's environmental policy properly to her. The press agent proposed a visit of factory that eventually never took place.

Although Shramenko claims that 74.ru tries to investigate the ecological impact of Chelyabinsk's big metallurgical players, the site's coverage on environmentalists seems rather biased. The site has done an interview with Vassiliy Moskovets, one of the most prominent StopGOK figures in 2017 during one of the most intense stages of the fight against the copper mine. Nevertheless, Shramenko expresses doubts on StopGOK movement's authenticity: "I don't think it is entirely unfounded that some people accuse them of playing someone's cards. I, for instance, do not understand who finances them." She mentions that the costs to hold meetings are rather high. They need to rent a sound system and microphones. She says that she never noticed that Sop GOK seeks to raise funds. Furthermore, she refers to a trustworthy source among state officials who claims to have information about StopGOK working on someone's payroll. She does not know whose payroll this could be. "I don't have facts. I only have questions without answers," she says.

The suspicion seems justified given the fact that pseudo-movements sometimes show up in Russia in order to manipulate public opinion in the interests of either the state or certain big companies. In the case of StopGOK, however, it is easy to refute this assumption. Pseudo-movements rather resist scrutiny; involved persons decline to give interviews and websites only offer incoherent information. However, StopGOK's activists openly expose their structure and hierarchies. The information given by different players within the movement is consistent and reveals little contradictions or ambiguities. Most actors can reasonably

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<sup>5</sup> A video of the conference can be found here. Shramenko's appearance starts at minute 39:00: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyAH5ss1nw0> (accessed 10 February 2020)

explain why they are concerned about the copper mine. They refer to earlier civic ecological engagements, as for instance engagement to preserve Chelyabinsk's inner-city forest. On request, activists explained to me that they fund their budget themselves and StopGOK's spending is indeed affordable for private persons who earn slightly more than the average salary in Russia. The movement does not rent offices or employ professional campaigners.

#### **4.2.2 Disinformation**

Disinformation can be defined as “misleading information that has the function of misleading someone” (Fallis 2015: 413). Its ultimate purpose is to spread confusion among political opponents, maybe to initiate internal conflicts and to weaken them in some way. Practices of disinforming modern media societies were increasingly developed by the Soviet Union's secret service KGB in the Cold War era. One of its most striking success is the spread of the conspiracy theory that the US government might have invented AIDS in order to suppress its vulnerable minorities. After having invested a long-term effort into spreading this story, these allegations were widely reported in Western newspapers in 1986 and 1987 and remains an influential conspiracy theory even decades later (Boghardt 2009). With the liberation of public discourse in Russia in the 1990s, disinformation became a tool more and more applied inside Russia, in elite conflicts, in electoral competition and, more generally spoken, as a tool to preserve power (Bekbulatova 2018).

Reading articles on 74.ru, it quickly becomes obvious that RMK regularly buys advertisement on 74.ru. However, RMK's management does not influence 74.ru's coverage of ecological conflicts, as Shramenko insists. Her colleagues from the advertising department who deal with RMK are even based on the opposite end of the company's office. She is not familiar with details of the PR partnership, she says. RMK pays for a subtle form of native advertising among 74.ru articles. The articles written by RMK's press office are marked as such only at the end of an article. Small red letters indicate “Company news” [novosti kompanii]. The advertising articles are integrated into the same subsections 74.ru puts the articles written by his own editorial board. By using the search engine for 74.ru's website, PR articles and genuine journalistic articles equally appear on the list of the results. They are not tagged differently.

The PR articles often appear as genuine press articles and refer to political events in their first lines: a statement by a minister of the federal government on Chelyabinsk's prospering economy, a governor's visit in a mining community. Thus, it takes some effort to discern a journalistic article from marketing. An exemplary article covers the visit of Chelyabinsk's governor Aleksey Teksler to the city Karabash whose most important employer is the copper

mining complex Karabashmed (see chapter 3.1.3). The article reads as a field reportage and contains many pictures with a fresh green lawn. The impressions are highly selective as the city is actually surrounded by black mining waste dumps. The article extensively covers RMK's investments into the social and ecological infrastructure of the city.<sup>6</sup>

By doing internet research, I was often confronted to what activists described to me as "information blockade" [informatsionnaya blokada]. RMK spreads articles written by their own press agency in all of Chelyabinsk's local online media, as well as in the Southern Ural edition of federal news outlets. The consequences are favourable search engines results for the company: Internet researches probably lead to articles written by RMK employees. Independent information on ecological topics often remains isolated in the internet. In order to find it, a usual search request with the help of key words often proves little helpful. In order to find valuable information, it is often necessary to look for a single specific article by already knowing the author's name and the website's domain. Valuable accounts are often hidden on the Russian blogging service livejournal.ru or on some pages in the social network Vkontakte. Conventional search algorithms often pass over them.

This strategy of search engine manipulation can be seen as a strategy to prevent the consolidation of civil protest through social media and digital infrastructure. A number of such strategies are described in Peter Pomerantsev's book *This is Not Propaganda* (2019). He particularly focuses on the use of bots and cyborgs – automatic social media users that are built in order to spread certain hashtags and create the illusion of a strong popular voice in favour of certain elites (Pomerantsev 2019: 74-82). Bots and cyborgs might also have been used to attack StopGOK activists. Boris Zolotarevskiy, interviewed on the 9th of March 2019, recalls: "In social networks appeared a group advocating Tominskiy GOK. They were ridiculing StopGOK activists. They had two favourite protagonists, Vassiliy Moskovets and me. They made this informational attack. It went so far that they uploaded pictures showing my girlfriend and me."

The copper mine conflict in Chelyabinsk is also covered by a small media outlet calling itself freepressa.ru or Centre for Free Journalism [tsentr svobodnoy zhurnalistiki]. It is unclear who owns it and who determines the editorial policy. According to data on the site's Youtube channel and on Facebook, the site has a very small audience. But it is the most productive multiplier of misleading information about the StopGOK movement. Its accusations are also repeated by other, more independent media. The site's main editor, Maksim Rumyantsev,

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<sup>6</sup> Available online at: <https://74.ru/text/gorod/66283558/> (accessed 26 November 2019)

is interviewed as an expert by the public broadcasting services in their television pieces on StopGOK.

By reviewing a small sample of articles that appeared on freepressa.ru as well as on similar online sources, a few arguments against StopGOK activists are repeated again and again: (1) StopGOK is funded from abroad. They act in the will of an unknown, but most likely foreign force. (2) Its activists are brutal, dubious people with an unsteady lifestyle. (3) StopGOK activists have no reputation as ecological experts, probably not even an ecological education. Rumyantsev's articles often focus on one chosen ecological activist. He puts in doubt the accuracy of his or her CV, for instance he expresses disbelief that someone has really an academic degree; he expresses disbelief that someone is able to make his ends meet by his professional activities, thus insinuating that his lifestyle is funded by an actor in the shadow. Some articles Rumyantsev shared on his personal Facebook profile have been deleted in the meantime. In Summer 2017, he apparently tried to expose StopGOK as a frantic separatist movement keen on violence. Those articles vanished from the website. The site seems to keep articles with angles that are misleading in a convincing manner. Rumyantsev's articles rarely contain blatant lies, at least not lies that can be easily refuted, but subtle misleading information and subtexts designed to change the conversation – away from the actual ecological conflict. The subtlety of disinformation would not work if Rumyantsev's articles were not supported by other repressive measures. For instance, it is relatively coherent to denounce someone as acting on behalf of a foreign power if the concerned person has ties to an NGO that was declared a foreign agent by the ministry of justice (see chapter 5.1).

Something similar holds true as well for the pattern focussing on StopGOK activists' supposedly unsteady lifestyle. Some StopGOK activists claim that they were threatened to lose their jobs if they continue to be active against the mining complex (see chapter 5.2). If this is true, Chelyabinsk's business and political elites themselves create the instability in the life of activists that is eventually exploited in attempts to spread disinformation.

The disinformation campaign against environmental activists seems to have two major target groups: committed environmental activists and their sympathisers on the one hand, as well as a broader, more general audience on the other hand. Among environmentalists, disinformation seeks to spread confusion, fear and, at best, seeks to raise conflicts within StopGOK. Reviewing discussions on social media, it becomes clear that it is often not easy for engaged and sophisticated environmentalists to recognize disinformation. In 2015, for example, an article was shared on social media that contained quotes by a dean of Chelyabinsk University. The dean explained that StopGOK activist Andrey Talevlin will no

longer teach at his faculty (Rumyantsev 2015). Activists shared this article presuming that Talevlin lost his job.<sup>7</sup> Talevlin was forced to deny this. In fact, he worked at another faculty. The person interviewed for the article had no power to release him from his duties.

Thus, this article spread confusion. But it also can evoke fear and outrage as the possibility of an environmental activist losing his job is realistic. Talevlin himself explains that he was pressed by his employer when I interviewed him on March the 4th: “There were threats. The man [Sergej Fedorovich Likhachev, L.L.] who is now the [regional] minister for ecological affairs worked at my university. We are colleagues at different faculties. He supports the copper mine in Tominskiy. He complained about me to the dean of my faculty.” To environmental experts (and also to non-experts) who in 2015 were contemplating to speak up publicly against the copper mine, Rumyantsev’s article signals that speaking up could have severe personal consequences.

Environmental conflicts in Chelyabinsk have also seen the emergence of the parody movement “Antismog”. My efforts to get in touch with its representatives were unsuccessful. After I sent an e-mail, the organisation’s president Mikhail Makhov called me several times in order to investigate what I was doing in Chelyabinsk. He delayed appointments repeatedly and finally did not answer to phone calls and written questions. During the phone calls, Makhov said that Antismog has an office in the city centre and at least one employee – a former StopGOK activist. It is hard to determine the organisation’s exact purposes and goals. Makhov’s interrogative tone on the phone implies that collecting information could be a purpose. It is probably no coincidence that Antismog employs a former StopGOK activist. Although the employee’s contact to the movement broke, this special perspective of someone who knows StopGOK from the inside can be strategically useful.

An analysis of the organisation’s website [анти-смог.рф](http://анти-смог.рф) reveals another purpose. It has hardly been updated since the spring of 2018 when the organisation “Chelyabinsk, Breathe!” was created. It is strongly allied to StopGOK, citizens are often involved in both movements and leading figures share experiences and prepare strategies together. In Spring 2018, “Chelyabinsk, Breathe!” publicly demanded the relocation of some of the city’s biggest industrial sites in order to improve the city’s air condition. It also installed devices to measure air pollution. With the help of those devices “Chelyabinsk, Breathe!” could prove that the air quality in Chelyabinsk degenerates on the weekends when the federal nature protection

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<sup>7</sup> On 30 August 2015 Nadeshda Kutepova wrote on Facebook: “Please share. The pride of Chelyabinsk was forced to stop teaching at university because he leads an NGO declared ‘foreign agent’.”



agency Rosprirodnadzor shuts down its official devices, as the anti-air-pollution activist Dmitriy Zakarlyukin, interviewed on the 5th of March, points out.

The homepage [анти-смог.рф](http://anti-smog.pf) appears to be designed to mislead internet users searching for information on “Chelyabinsk, Breathe!” and on civic activism in the context of air pollution. Many features of the homepage are similar to the website of „Chelyabinsk, Breathe!“ ([chelbreathe.ru](http://chelbreathe.ru)), for instance the prominently featured offer to directly chat with or talk to one of the organisation’s activists. On its website, Antismog asks to report smog clouds. For this purpose, two phone numbers are prominently posted on the website, yet neither works. At the bottom of the website it lists partner organisations, mostly Australian companies whose names contain the syllables „eco“ – creating the appearance of foreign funding. This gestures to state media’s propaganda against foreign agents. The homepage is apparently designed to frustrate people trying to connect with the anti-pollution movement.

#### **4.2.3 Breaking the information blockade**

The channelling of media coverage can be considered a repressive strategy. In contrast to their political opponents, environmental activists cannot rely on local media to communicate their findings and messages. Their messages are effectively blocked from spreading to a larger audience in the city. The anti-copper-mine movement cannot be totally silenced, but their struggle is not represented as urgent in local media. Primarily, they have to spread information through social media and blogs, which can also be manipulated by trolls and search engine optimisation. They face disinformation campaigns doubting StopGOK’s grassroots funding and the parody movements that are supposed to mislead the public. All this qualifies as measures aimed at increasing cost of their actions, and thus, forms of repression.

This repressive strategy is characterised by its relative invisibility. Although conflicts around mining and air pollution are obviously not represented in a balanced manner in local media, a lot of questions remain unanswered. The ownership structures of local media are often not transparent. On their own websites, they often just reveal the address of a company responsible for the content. Long and tiring puzzle games – as well as hints given by experts and insiders – are necessary to check which media outlet is controlled by whom. The processes of censorship in local media outlets are complicated. Industrial companies have at least two significant means to provoke censorship: firstly, they refuse to cooperate with independent journalists by not answering questions and sharing as little information as possible. Secondly, they can exert influence on editorial policies by spending large sums on advertisements and thus making media depend on them financially.

In Russia, violence against civil activists and journalists is largely normalized. Companies like RMK cooperate with violent entrepreneurs, with martial arts athletes and former soldiers in order to threaten their opponents (see chapter 5). Journalists working in the field have this in mind, so that press agents do not need to threaten them expressis verbis. A few ambiguous sentences uttered by company representatives on the quality of a journalist's work could be enough to achieve an intimidating effect.

By determining the intents of the repressive policy in the media, a combination of the weakness model and the threat model can be applied. On the one hand, local media in Chelyabinsk lack independent funding, as it would be granted by a large amount of paying subscribers. They depend on advertising or on an owner with particular propaganda goals. On the other hand, local media are a substantial force in environmental conflicts. Mobilisation in environmental movements can highly increase if critical information is accurately published in media and if media offer a space to coordinate oppositional activities. The manipulation of media might be highly effective, but it is still a rather soft repressive strategy. This also means that it is possible to overcome it. In 2017, activists have finally achieved to attract attention of federal independent media. An important trigger was the appearance of Aleksey Naval'nyy during a protest rally in Chelyabinsk on April the 15th 2017. The Naval'nyy Team [shtab Naval'nogo] in Chelyabinsk is closely allied to StopGOK and Naval'nyy spoke during the rally. The rally took place six weeks after Naval'nyy's Anti-Corruption fund released its famous documentary on Prime Minister Dmitriy Medvedev's offshore property. At the time, Naval'nyy toured through Russia in order to start the campaign for his presidential bid. He also opened a campaign office in Chelyabinsk. The decision whether he should speak at the rally or not was broadly discussed within StopGOK, as Irina Poletavkina recounts:

Sergey [Belogorokhov] and I were organising the rally. Out of the blue, Boris Zolotarevskiy asked us whether we want to let Navalnyy speak. Then we all came together because you cannot decide all this on your own. We came together at the square where they allowed us to make the rally. We debated whether we should let him speak or not. If we decided to give him the stage, we could be sure that there will be some hullabaloo [shumikha].

In a group of 12 to 13 activists, as Poletavkina recounts, they decided to give Naval'nyy the stage. The decision was remarkably unanimous taking into account that many activists once were Putin supporters. The only argument against Naval'nyy's appearance was the fear of increased pressure against activists in the aftermath. It turned out that this fear was justified. Poletavkina explains:

As a consequence, they started to put pressure on us. They called us to the public prosecutor's office. When Naval'nyy announced that he will come to Chelyabinsk, it was really horrible [laughing]. At the prosecutor's office they told us: 'This is not rightful. You don't understand.'

They also called us into the city administration. Employees of the centre to counteract extremism were present. Even before the meeting they were putting pressure on us. We had a lawyer with us. He talked to those people very well, very calmly. When Sergey and I went to the meeting. 90 minutes before the beginning we came to the square. It was full of police cars, astronauts [colloquial expression, i.e. fully equipped riot police officer, L.L.], dogs.

Poletavkina says that such an intimidating show-off of police force did not happen at protest rallies before. She was afraid of a provocation, a commonly used strategy to dissolve protests. Agent provocateurs move among the crowd in order to provoke conflicts that gives riot police officers legitimate grounds to arrest activists and to use violence (see chapter 5.4). The rally passed peacefully. Poletavkina primarily sees the positive effects of Naval'nyy's appearance:

„After this rallye, our regional government responded to the resolution we were reading out. The [newspaper] Guardian has written about us.<sup>8</sup> Well, most of the article was about Naval'nyy of course. But at least, it also dealt with the GOK problem. At the time, we achieved to break the local information blockade. As a consequence, federal media started to get interested in the matter. Alisa Kustikova started to come. She is a smartass and has written a wonderful article.“

From Summer 2017, Kustikova regularly covered StopGOK's fight against the copper mine for Novaya Gazeta. This provoked national attention to the copper mine's risks for Chelyabinsk. It also made repressive policies more visible. Kustikova regularly reported on the police pressure against environmental activists. This nationwide attention in Novaya Gazeta is a protective measure against violence and politically motivated policing. Furthermore, Kustikova helped by digging up information that proved valuable for StopGOK. As Novaya Gazeta contributed reporting on the Panama Papers in 2016, she had access to exclusive data that helped to reconstruct the complicated offshore construction behind RMK that is designed to evade taxes (Kustikova 2018).

### **4.3 Restricting public space**

The less environmental activists have access to media, the more important became alternative ways to reach out to citizens. Political groups' access to the streets is subject to many restrictions. Activists largely depend on city officials' good will. Public rallies have to be officially registered at the city administration. Most city administration impose restrictions on the organisers of oppositional rallies. For example, they are pushed to the outskirts of a city or to places that are nearly invisible. Moreover, it has become common practice to surround protest rallies with fences and to control people at the entrance with metal detectors. Formally, this is a security measure, but it looks as if it is designed to prevent

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<sup>8</sup> The Guardian's extensive portrait on Naval'nyj dedicates about a dozen sentences to his appearance at the StopGOK Rallye (Walker 2017).

random passers-by from listening in to the rally's speeches. It has an intimidating effect and contains the protest rally within clear borders. Rallies are also subject to a clear time regime. They are mostly sanctioned to take place two or three hours. In 2019 StopGOK organised a public rally on the 21st of April. Its time limits were clearly restricted to two hours – from 1 to 3 pm.

Activists can also ask to hold a small-scale public rally [piket], a picketing line that rather resembles to a publicly installed information desk. In their requests to install information desks, citizens need to mention its purpose and its political topic. They need to make a list of all slogans that will be exposed on banners. Organisers also need to predict the number of participants, which may not surpass 20 to 30 participants.

During my field research, StopGOK activist Sergey Likhvatskikh requested permission to stand in a picketing line in the central Kirov street on the 10th of March 2019. It was rejected on the grounds that this exact corner of Kirov Street will already be occupied by another group. The deputy mayor's office argued in its rejection letter that providing two picketing points at the same time at a nearby place would be dangerous and violate the public order. As the indicated number of participants (30 participants were requested) was too high, the city administration argued that it needed to act "in defence of public interests, support public order and assure citizen's safety". But this was made up, there was no other group demonstrating on Kirov Street, as I witnessed myself walking down Kirov Street on that day. Kirov Street is a car-free zone in the city's very centre. As such, it is the city's most ideal place for information desks. Apart from Kirov Street it is difficult to find an appropriate picketing spot in Chelyabinsk. Since 2009, the Chelyabinsk city administration is implementing a policy called street revolution [dorozhnaya revolutsiya]. The city systematically broadens streets creating space for cars at the cost of walking areas, parks and squares. Even without this program of broadening streets, the city as such is already extensive and spacious. The city has to administer a bigger area and more street surface area than neighbouring Yekaterinburg, which has much more inhabitants (1.2 millions to 1.5 millions). This is most probably linked to Chelyabinsk's large industrial areas. the city's huge factory sites separate the different urban districts from each other. Geographically, Chelyabinsk is hardly perceived as an entity. This division is promoted by the city's urban policy, which does not only concern the broadening of streets. Public transport is in a notoriously bad shape and a huge percentage of buses consists of unlicensed marshrutkas. Schedules are either unreliable or non-existent. Oppositional activists suspect that the illegal marshrutka business is closely tied to city deputies and officials. Otherwise, it would probably have been replaced by a more efficient public transport system (Zhilin 2019).

StopGOK activist Vladimir Pisanov considers this an obstacle to raise awareness on RMK's proposed copper mine. Every district of Chelyabinsk is built around one or several factories that already cause ecological damage and significant health hazards. Inhabitants of those districts, as Pisanov suggests, tend to be more focused on the damage caused by their neighbouring factory than by a potential future danger coming somewhere from the south. Additionally, as proven by "Chelyabinsk, Breathe!" the air in the city is notoriously worse during weekends – when activists usually organise picketing lines. This is yet another reason for people not to go outside. Air quality, lack of convenient public spaces and the city's division can be considered as burdens for the success of street agitation. Under these conditions, the city administration can largely diminish a social movement's chances to be publicly heard if they undermine access to public spaces.

One form of protest does not require an official permission: one person demonstrations [odinochnyy piket]. It requires a demonstrator to remain in a small distance to his fellow activists that might surround him. If he is surrounded by a crowd, he is the only one allowed to hold a banner. Police officers mostly check the demonstrator's passport, take a photo of him and allow to continue, yet arrests and penalty fees can occur. Over long periods of 2016 and 2017 – when the conflict was in its most intense stage and the outcome seemed the least predictable – StopGOK organised single-person-demonstrations on different points in the city on a daily basis.

Even if this form of protest is legal, it is not safe from being disrupted. One police strategy is intimidation. Among the crowd surrounding single-person demonstrations law enforcement officers are often present, for instance employees of the Anti-Extremism Centre [Tsentri Protivodeystviya Ekstremizma], that are colloquially called "Eshniki". Galina Gorina recounts that an Eshnik once told her to go home, partly insinuating that it would be better for her health to stay at home, as the air pollution is severe and Gorina suffers from asthma. Disguised as a friendly compassionate recommendation, Gorina considers it offensive: "I am born here. My loved ones are buried here. I am a citizen of this country. If they tell me that I should not speak out on the street that I should better go into my apartment, I will defend myself." Such provocations can trigger activists so much that their angry behaviour gives the police legal grounds to set up administrative penalties or even persecute activists. Galina Gorina continues: "The Eshniki know me. Every time I go out to demonstrations, they greet me and try to talk about anything with me. I answer: 'You have put on a wire. You want to seduce me to openly say things. Then you will fine me for my words.' He says no."

In some cases, activists might decide to go on the streets without permission from the authorities. In Chelyabinsk, such a rally was planned when the construction of Tominskiy GOK started in 2017. These actions are often small in scale because it is difficult to find open information on such non-permitted public gatherings. People who publish content on social media about the date and the meeting point of a non-permitted rally risk to be fined or even a few days of arrest. Hence, information has to spread in a rather private manner. During the meeting itself, activists showing up also risk to be arrested and charged with a fine. Boris Zolotarivskiy remembers organising an illegal gathering:

When the construction of Tominskiy GOK started, I called for people to go out [on the streets]. The action was called ‘Tominskiy GOK is Chelyabinsk’s death’. About 80 people came. I called for a day of mourning. The action passed and they fined me for 25.000 rubles, although I did not disturb anybody. They said it was a provocation and I disturbed tourists and street cleaners.

This kind of punishment, as it openly sanctions the public utterance of an opinion, could already be counted as coercion. The margins are not clearly defined.

Different measures to restrict access to public space have different kinds of visibility. For example, psychological distress intentionally created by law enforcement officers often remains unobserved. As such, it is difficult to determine their exact effect.

It remains rather unobserved when environmental activists do not find locations to rent for organised events – a form of informal pressure on activists. Dmitriy Zakarlyukin, activist of “Chelyabinsk, Breathe!“, gives an example:

Zakarlyukin: We organised a roundtable on air [pollution], under participation of a UN representative. One day before the event, one location was cancelled, then a second. Eventually, we had to gather the whole delegation in the office of the Minister for Environmental Affairs.

Interviewer: What did that mean for the Event? There was less space in the minister’s office, I suppose?

Zakarlyukin: Of course. Maximum 20 people. We invited 50 to 70 people. Furthermore, two relocations had a very bad effect on our image. Some people who especially came to Chelyabinsk could simply not enter.

Despite the many laws, proceedings and unofficial rules that regulate access to public space in Russia, it is possible to spread StopGOK’s demands. According to an opinion poll from 2016, 73 percent of Chelyabinsk citizens objected to the construction of a copper mining complex in the city’s outskirts; the numbers for the entire Oblast’ are less clear, but still a majority opposes it.<sup>9</sup> Considering environmentalists’ difficulties to express their points of view in the local media, the result of this survey can be widely explained by two reasons. Firstly, as in Chelyabinsk’s recent history of environmental disasters sensitized citizens about

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<sup>9</sup> The poll has been provided by the state-controlled Public Opinion Research Center (Vtsiom) [Vserossiyskij Tsentr izucheniya obshchestvenogo mneniya]: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115579> (accessed 11 January 2020)

the dangers associated with the mining industry. Secondly, StopGOK could not entirely be denied access to public space. Andrey Talevlin recounts:

At the beginning, we started going through all the villages and passed them this information [on the planned copper mining complex]. Nobody knew about that. We gathered in schools, went to the local administrative bodies, met with businessmen. The first year was dedicated to make people know. We were on the road every weekend.

Despite many restrictions, the environmentalists patiently campaigned. StopGOK activists could not be entirely prevented from visiting villages, agitating and gaining strength.

## **5 Coercion and violence**

### **5.1 The “foreign agent law” as a tool to dismantle institutions**

An important role in the first stages of the conflict played the NGO For Nature [Za Prirodu]. It considers itself as an advocacy group defending Chelyabinsk citizens’ right to live in a healthy environment. In the 2000s, the NGO particularly worked on nuclear energy and nuclear waste. It filed lawsuits to stop the construction of a nuclear power plant (Yudina 2008), and it took action against the import of nuclear waste from Hungary (Artemova 2011). In December 2013, For Nature organised the first public hearings on the project that took place in Chelyabinsk and featured independent experts. It also engaged in several lawsuits against RMK. The main goal of those processes was to enable an independent ecological expertise (see chapter 4.1). In the wake of those processes, For Nature was registered as a foreign agent.

What does that mean? In 2012, a law was established that requires non-commercial organisations to register as foreign agents if they receive funding from abroad and if they act in a political way. But no organisation registered voluntarily. The law started being applied on a large scale in 2014 when organisations were forced to register. The first wave of forced registration concerned human rights advocacy groups, as for instance “Soldiers’ Mothers” [soldatskie materi] a group defending recruits’ rights. The second wave concerned environmental organisations (Barkovskaya 2017).

On March the 6th 2015, the ministry of justice registered the charitable fund For Nature as an “organisation acting in the function of a foreign agent”. Talevlin, who run the NGO, was informed about this registration post factum as the Ministry of Justice sent him an e-mail. He, as the NGO’s representative, had no chance to be heard before the decision. They had no knowledge about him being investigated by the Ministry of Justice, although For Nature’s office has regularly been the object of raids since 2013.

For Nature was one of the first organisations concerned by this second wave. At the time, environmentalists did not have experience with the law. Reviewing social media posts from March 2015 shows that this registration produced perplexity. It was unclear what effects this step would have.

As a legal entity, For Nature was registered as a “charitable fund” [blagotvoritel’nyy fond] and as a “movement” [dvizhenie]. The fund received support from the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature. Andrey Talevlin who headed both organisations hoped that he could prevent legal persecution through this double structure. The fund was supposed to work in the field of legal defence; whereas the movement was created “to work on the project StopGOK” (Talevlin 2015b), i.e. in a more political context. Both entities were registered at the same address. Talevlin argues that no funds were transferred from one organisation to the other. The dvizhenie did not even have a bank account.

On May the 13th 2015, a court in Chelyabinsk fined the fund for 100.000 rubles for not having registered as a foreign agent. By charging this fine, the judiciary branch explicitly confirmed the registration as lawful. Both organisations remained on the list of foreign agents. The argument: For Nature tried to influence the public’s opinion on the copper mine in Tominskiy, thereby it tried to change the state’s politics. Thus, it was considered as political. What were the consequences of this decision? At first, it led to a new framing of state propaganda and disinformation. The court sessions in May were covered by the state-controlled TV channel Rossiya1. The coverage was framed in the propaganda sound that became en vogue after the revolution in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Donbass and Luhansk. Talevlin was falsely accused of receiving funds from a US agency (a US agency that was run by the daughter of a Ukrainian Nationalist, a comrade of Bandera!). Talevlin’s goal was accused of paying demonstrators, to weaken the state’s authority. The strategic aim of those protests was suspected to be the destabilisation of Russia’s industrial heartland.<sup>10</sup> For Nature’s entry into the register of foreign agents and the process deciding over the administrative fine disclosed some details on the organisation’s accounting that encouraged this particular framing in the media. A misleading report claimed that Talevlin lost his job at University and his academic recognition among environmental activists (Rumyantsev 2015; see chapter 4.2.2).

More importantly, from the registration onwards, For Nature was subject to a series of raids, inquiries and administrative charges. Talevlin describes this period in his blog in June 2015, three months after the registration:

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<sup>10</sup> The report of Rossiya1 can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnD5BMylt8s> (accessed 11 January 2020)



At For Nature, inspections by the ministry of justice do not stop [...]. Every month the pressure exerted by state authorities grows. Only recently, officials from the ministry of justice handed out 8 attestations on violations of administrative law. Three times, courts repealed the administrative fine. (Talevlin 2015c)

Administrative fines are often charged on grounds that a foreign agent failed to reveal its status as a foreign agent somewhere on its homepage or in social media posts:

And of course the pressure on For Nature continues. This time, a denunciation to the prosecutor's office was written by the coordinator of LDPR [Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, L.L.] – Vitailiy Pashinyy, right on the party's letter paper. The vigilant liberal did not like that material on za-prirodu.ru that does not contain references on the movement's status as a foreign agent [...]. I am forced to give an explanation at the prosecutor's office. (Talevlin 2015a)

For Nature received its highest fine in November 2016:

A judge of Chelyabinsk court district No. 1 'convicted' the movement 'For Nature' to yet another fine of 400.000 rubles. The protocol was written by Roskomnadzor [The Russian Media Control Agency, L.L.], where specialists studied my posts from 2015 and decided that there was a violation of the law – second part of article 19.34 in the Code of Administrative Violations. This norm foresees a strong punishment for a societal association that publishes material without revealing its status as a foreign agent. [...] This would not be exceptional, however the material under investigation was published in my [personal blog on] livejournal. This means that Roskomnadzor judges now decide when I utter my personal opinion and when I represent a legal entity. It is remarkable that the articles concern the GOK in Tominskiy [...]. Additionally, the court also fined me personally, as the official representative in charge, with 50.000 rubles. (Talevlin 2016a)

Apart from the fines, the status as a foreign agent imposes a high amount of bureaucratic demands on the organisation. Suddenly, it can become an object of raids and investigations; it can be asked to fulfill nearly impossible tasks. As Talevlin recounts in his blog on the 5th of July 2016, this can cost a lot of time, a crucial resource in politics:

I went to the prosecutor's office again. Since yesterday, I have no time to prepare for the elections, I cannot prepare the candidacies of the Yabloko list [Talevlin also headed the Yabloko party in Chelyabinsk, L.L.]. Yes, law enforcement officials came to the office of Yabloko without warning. Today the city's deputy prosecutor Ol'ga Anatol'evna Chubuk asked me for explanations on matters of For Nature. This took two hours. Yet again, [...] they were looking for foreign funding. However, it would be impossible to find something because there has not been such a funding since last year [...]. The prosecutor asked me for ALL [sic!] documents since 2014. Simply ALL [sic!] documents on the [organisation's] activity and legally attested copies of them. All this with a ridiculous deadline of one day. Today, I brought the documentation I could find within half a day.

Now the prosecutor announced that she still wants ALL [sic!] documents to the 7th of July. I have the impression that they want to paralyse my societal and political activity. (Talevlin 2016b)

In December 2016, For Nature was liquidated after the ministry of justice filed a lawsuit seeking For Nature's breakup. Most of For Nature's lawsuits against RMK were continued by another newly founded association headed by the lawyer Vladimir Kazantsev, as Talevlin explains in an interview on March the 4th 2019.

The repressive measures applied in the context of the foreign agent law is to be considered as coercion. The fines for law violations are high and arbitrary. Activists are kept busy

defending their rights in court and justifying their practices in mandatory interrogations at law enforcement organs. This time is lost for the actual fight. Whereas the repressive measures described in chapter 4 try to appear not as explicit political legislation, the steps taken in the context of the foreign agent law are expressis verbis directed by the will to weaken political opposition. A study shows that NGOs renounce from taking a broader political stand from criticising government position even if they do not have foreign funding (Moser et al. 2018: 607-611).

It seems odd how many different actors take part in exerting repression in this context. The original demand to include For Nature in the register of foreign agents was authored by Chelyabinsk's regional FSB department. At least from July 2014 on, it sent several documentations about For Nature to the Ministry of Justice. After the inclusion into the register, the prosecutor's office, Roskomnadzor and the representative of a political party wrote complaints against the NGO and went into court demanding fines. The NGO's breakup was finally demanded by the ministry of justice. Talevlin assumes that the whole process was initiated by RMK, even though it did not write complaints. On 6 November 2016 Talevlin writes on Facebook: "I think that state organs only fulfilled a certain order. All of For Nature's problems have only begun after making public the problems in the context of Tominskij GOK and its active legal work in this context." He reiterated this point of view when I interviewed him two and a half years later. Taking into account the political and economic order in the region, this suspicion seems justified. As shown in chapter 3.2, there is a historic connection between organised crime, private security business (mostly run by former FSB agents and thus connected to the FSB) and the copper industry in the Ural in 1990s. Assuming that this connection still holds in parts, it is plausible to assume that RMK ordered legal sanctions against For Nature.

The sanctions could also be raised in the context of a more general roundup against environmental organisations that is suspected to have been taken place in 2015 (Barkovskaya 2017). A sentence uttered by Putin during his annual press conference in December 2016 makes plausible that such a strategy existed: "Ecological organisations are sometimes used by our competitors in order to hold down [pritopit'] growing segments of the Russian infrastructure."<sup>11</sup> Putin's statement hints at a radical pro-business policy. On the one hand, he identifies businessmen with assets in the industrial sector with the national common good

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<sup>11</sup> A sequence of Putin's press conference was shown in the TV show "chelovek i zakon" dated from 30 December 2016: [https://www.1tv.ru/shows/chelovek-i-zakon/vypuski/chelovek-i-zakon-vypusk-ot-30-12-2016?fbclid=IwAR29PGJNSKlfv5zIHFFxU1X5QLTJzUtbLYkMgOiXVHzk62jz9OBJ\\_-25fc](https://www.1tv.ru/shows/chelovek-i-zakon/vypuski/chelovek-i-zakon-vypusk-ot-30-12-2016?fbclid=IwAR29PGJNSKlfv5zIHFFxU1X5QLTJzUtbLYkMgOiXVHzk62jz9OBJ_-25fc) (accessed 15 December 2019)

itself. On the other hand, he identifies environmental activists with spies. Both explanations do not contradict each other. They can be understood as complimentary. The application of the foreign agent law results from a cooperation between Ural economic elites and national political elites.

## **5.2 Economic pressure: making activists lose their job**

Political activists appear to be disadvantaged on the job market in Chelyabinsk. Yet it is hard to find an example of somebody who stopped his political activity after receiving credible threats. The relevant people might prefer staying out of public scrutiny because the disclosure of such a threat could also be a reason for being fired. Such threats can be made more convincingly in smaller cities that largely depend on one industrial sector. According to activists against coal mining in Kuzbass, this is an effective method to undercut civic participation in smaller mono-cities – cities that depend on one big enterprise.<sup>12</sup> In Chelyabinskaya Oblast' 16 cities, among them Magnitogorsk, Karabash and Ozersk, count as mono-cities. This certainly affects the level of pluralism in the region (Shramenko 2019). The region's capital, however, is more diverse in economic terms. It attracts people in free professions and academics who cannot be as easily blackmailed by their employers. Its economy is slightly more diverse.

Yet, it is not only important whether somebody has *in fact* been fired for his political activities. It is already a significant reality as such that rumours are shared among citizens and within circles of activists. This alone has consequences on people's readiness to commit themselves to environmental activism.

Andrey Talevlin explained that Chelyabinsk's minister of ecological affairs wanted him to be dismissed from university. However Talevlin was relatively protected because of his reputation. In 2015 he already worked at university for more than a decade. In 2013 he was awarded "jurist of the year" by Chelyabinsk's association of jurists. All this did not guarantee that he would remain free from persecution:

Interviewer: Why did this not intimidate you? Did you not need to take it seriously?

Talevlin: I don't know. Maybe it was serious, maybe it was not. Probably it was serious. As a matter of principle, I do not intend to step back. Those are principal things. I am a specialist. I know the consequences. I can look at the facts, and I see what all that leads to.

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<sup>12</sup> On 25 November 2019, two activists fighting against environmental hazards of coal mining in Kuzbass, Anna Fomina and Anton Lementuyev, gave talks at a conference in Berlin organised by Heinrich Boell foundation. They both claimed that the fear of losing their jobs regularly prevents people from participating in activism against the coal industry.

Moreover, StopGOK activists mention the example of an employee of the fake movement Antismog who used to be a committed StopGOK activist. To protect her privacy, I will only identify her by initials: O. E. Irina Poletavkina described her as highly committed: „She made a big contribution without a doubt. She organised single-person demonstrations. She had the oversight who was standing where and for how long. She did a lot in order to spread knowledge about the problem to the largest audience possible.” Now her work consists of undermining civic activism. StopGOK Activists assume that financial issues motivated her to switch sides, as stated by Irina Poletavkina:

It is possible that an important criterion was the financial side. [...] This is hard to judge. Everybody has his own life. [...] Maybe it became harder to support the family. She did not work at the time. Maybe she wants to be employed by the state. This kind of PR is easily earned money.

Apart from those concrete cases that are hard to disclose, there is a general perception among activists that citizens' personal financial affairs have a strong impact on their political activity. Not only O. E. might have had an economic incentive to ideologically support a pro-government position. In a broader sense, loyalty to local elites and economic success are strongly linked in the perception of Chelyabinsk citizens. In an interview taken on the 10th of March, Boris Zolotarevskiy, coordinator of Chelyabinsk Naval'nyy Team between 2018 and 2019, states:

There are three options. Either you leave, or you resign, you arrange yourself within the system. I have acquaintances that became members of Molodaya Gvardia [The youth organisation of Russia's ruling party Yedinaya Rossiya, L.L.] and work there. That means, they arranged themselves with the system. They will have everything, for some time everything will be fine for them. They have much more money than I have. And there is a third way, the hardest, but also the most sincere. And this is – I don't want to sound pathetic – political fight.

Zolotarevskiy makes clear that challenging official state policy in Russia is often a choice that has impacts on every aspect of a person's life, on job opportunities and on social prestige. It is a life choice that goes far beyond the question of how people spend their weekends. Moreover, activists explain the low rates of participation in environmental movements by the high rate of people living in poverty or in other kinds of high economic distress. Dmitriy Zakarlyukin says:

Yes, interest in ecological problems has really grown. More and more activities take place. But this is still a negligibly [nichtozhno] little percentage [...]. The biggest part of the population lives in deep apathy. Ecological questions are interesting for those who think today about tomorrow. Those people who have the possibility to think about tomorrow. Not only about today: how to pay the credit rates, how to pay for communal services, how pay for food. Those questions are more urgent for [most people].

Irina Poletavkina makes a similar point on economic pressure: “Most often people here are closed. They are exhausted. Many people’s first struggles concern what to eat, how to pay the flat.”

### **5.3 Private violence tolerated by the state**

#### **5.3.1 RMK strongmen violently ruling the villages**

RMK’s preparedness to use political violence became major national news in Summer 2019 when Yekaterinburg citizens protested against the construction of an Orthodox church sponsored by RMK’s owner Igor Altushkin. On the 13th of May, a popular square in the city centre was suddenly declared construction site and blocked by a fence, as citizens unexpectedly discovered. Several thousand people spontaneously tried to occupy the place, but they were brutally stopped by RMK’s security service, as well as other martial arts fighters not wearing uniforms. The police did not intervene as fighters applied violence. In the aftermath, a criminal investigation has been opened against those private security forces, but as of December 2019, no suspect could be tracked. This is odd, as some fighters involved in violent assaults could be identified by journalists. Thanks to the work of the same journalists, we also know that there is a Yekaterinburg-based network of clubs and small enterprises that sell violence exerted by experienced martial arts fighters (Drobina et al. 2019). Years before pictures and videos of the conflict in Yekaterinburg made it into national news, the same repressive scheme was applied in Chelyabinsk and in the smaller villages surrounding the designated location of the Tominskiy copper mine.

Intimidating strongmen were regularly present during the public hearings on the construction project in the villages. They occupied places in the halls where the hearing took place. They prevented notorious environmental activists from taking part by controlling the access to public hearings. Videos made by activists in 2017 in Tomino show long queues at the entrance. Even people who were not known as environmentalists were refused to enter the building, although they are registered in the local administrative district (Kustikova 2017b).

Similar procedures happened already in the years before:

On the 30th of September 2016, policemen and men in black without any signs identifying them blocked the entrance to the public hearings in the village Tominskiy. To the hearings on October the 14th on the stairs gathered men in black uniforms with the sign ‘RMK security’. They were hiding their faces in jackets and block the entrance to the building. The situation was repeated a week later.

In April 2017 strongmen with black hats surrounded the stairs of the local administration, explaining that there is ‘no place’ at the public hearings. (Kustikova 2017b)

Those strongmen were not only present during public hearings. Since the construction began in 2017, they are present nearby the construction site and ready to exert violence. In the

villages, it is relatively easy to identify outspoken critics of the copper mine, as the population is small. Tominskiy consists only of a few streets. When I visited Tominskiy on the 3rd of March 2019, only one outspoken critic of the copper mine remained in the village, as activists said. Other critics have either left the villages or renounced their critical points of view. Ol'ga Yakovets is a pensioner. She recounts that employees of "RMK security" regularly tried to intimidate her. For instance, a few employees riding on quads blocked her car on a street for several minutes. Similar incidents happened to others; RMK's quads became infamous. Activists consider it dangerous to go alone to the villages. They fear to be beaten up or to become the subject of a manipulated criminal investigation (see chapter 5.4). Yakovets also describes being mobbed by local villagers.

I tried to talk to local inhabitants in three grocery stores in Tominskiy. Introducing myself as a journalist, I asked about their opinion on the copper mine and whether they have relatives or acquaintances working on the construction site. I approached approximately a dozen people. Except for one person, nobody was willing to talk. One woman gave me the number of a woman working as press agent for ZAO Tominskiy GOK. Another woman angrily said: "The copper mine is being built. What can we do about it?" She was unwilling to elaborate her opinion. After declining to answer my questions, a third woman predicted: "Nobody is going to talk to you." No villager said to have friends or relatives working on the construction site.

Only one person engaged in a conversation: S. S., an 18-year old, member of family that runs a grocery store. S. studies in Chelyabinsk and works at his family's grocery store on weekends. His family immigrated from Kyrgyzstan when he was six years old. After they struggled to survive in their home country, they built up their house including their grocery shop "with their own hands", as he emphasises. He recounts that the villagers used to be much more sceptical about copper mining in their backyard. He remembers local demonstrations against the copper mine in which local villagers took part. He is scientifically educated and very well informed about the project. For several minutes he points out the risks that would come along with the copper mine. He and his family have become naturalised Russian citizens. Nevertheless, it would not come to his mind to participate in collective action. During our conversation he was listing facts, either holding back his opinion or relating to the copper mine neutrally. He expresses his personal concern in the words: "If it becomes very bad you can still leave." He says this in a tone, as if it would not be a large sacrifice to leave the home his family built by its own hands.

It would have been expectable to meet a few supporters of the copper mine, people explaining that they found a good steady employment. Instead of outspoken support and outspoken opposition, the village Tominskiy was marked by distrust. It should also be kept in mind that a few public hearings had to be repeated after citizens did not approve parts of the copper mine (Kustikova 2017b). This proves that a considerable amount of dissent existed among citizens at least until 2014 or 2015. S. confirms that Tominskiy has seen demonstration with the participation of local villagers. This dissent appears to have vanished. As people's unwillingness to talk shows, the opposition has not vanished by the force of a convincing argument. The conversation with S. indicates as well that people have become well informed on possible dangers of the project. Yet hardly anyone dares to publicly articulate concerns.

Martial arts fighters in the backyard might have had an intimidating effect. On the situation in the villages StopGOK activist Boris Zolotarevskiy commented: "It is one thing to live in Chelyabinsk and speak up against the GOK; but it is another thing for them [the residents of the villages], where next to them professional fighters with truncheons ride on their quads. If you watch an elderly woman's eyes over there, she is scared about what happens."

### **5.3.2 Psychological pressure**

In addition to this market of physical violence, Russia also has a market for more sophisticated ways of exerting pressure. Investigative journalism discovered partly how this business works. In December 2019, Novaya Gazeta reported how the campaign of an independent candidate for the Moscow city council was undermined by paid agents working on a freelance basis for United Russia candidates. Novaya Gazeta received a file that contained an entire agenda with destructive activities, from producing elaborate disinformation documents that are difficult to debunk, to exert pressure on the parents of one particular employee of the election campaign (Korotkov 2019).

The networks and institution that could run a similar market in Chelyabinsk are undetected; and yet similarly subtle actions occur. In early 2018, StopGOK activist Sergey Belogorokhov received an anonymous message on vkontakte informing him that papers were posted on buildings in one district in Chelyabinsk that show a photography of him and accuse him of being a paedophile. The posters warned: "Paedophile uncle Seryosha: For two years, Belogorokhov Sergey Sergeyevich rapes the student [the name of a female activists in the local Naval'nyy Team was inserted, L.L.]. If you discover him, do not call the police handle with him right in place [raspravit'sya s nim na mestu] or call the parents." The indicated

phone number belonged to a person who claims not to be involved in the issue when journalists called her (“‘Pri obnaruzhenii ne soobshchat’ politsii” 2019).

This cannot be understood as an attempt to misinform citizens. Posters were only spread in two districts in Chelyabinsk and did not contain any reference to the StopGOK movement. First and foremost, actions like these are intimidation attempts.

Apart from this, Belogorokhov faced multiple other repressive measures. In 2019, Russian authorities extended legislation to punish citizens for their discourse on social media. There are laws that prohibit to share extremist content and fake news. In their ambiguities, those laws can be used in order to fine activists. Belogorokhov became a victim of this new legislation. In autumn 2019, he was accused of spreading fake news when he commented on cracks and holes that appeared in a street in the village Roza. He uttered the suspicion that more fissures could occur, as the copper mine near Chelyabinsk will be dug further. Under his post, people shared anger and expressed willingness to protest. Under consideration of those reactions, his post was interpreted as designed to spread anger. Belogorokhov was fined to pay 40.000 rubles.

In 2017 his home was raided. The police pushed him violently on the ground during the procedure. He was called to interrogations multiple times.

I did not record an interview with Belogorokhov. Together with others, he drove me around the water reservoir and showed me the villages Tomino and Tominskiy on the 3rd of March 2019. He was unemployed at the time, suspecting that this paedophilia campaign contributed to his difficulties to find an employment. I encountered him as short-tempered and emotional. In the car he screamed at an elderly driver crossing our way who, in Belogorokhov’s perception, was too hesitant. In his anger, he often explained local political affairs in such a polemical manner that it was difficult to find some basis to verify them. For instance, he claimed that RMK has bought all the media in Chelyabinskaya Oblast’ which is hyperbolically overstated and explains nothing. He explained that he dislikes the liberal party Yabloko for being too elitist, even though it is the party in Chelyabinsk involved in the struggle against the copper mine. In my presence, fellow StopGOK activists also accused him of being unfair and misleading after he expressed anger at a former StopGOK activist. His anger might have created a delusion that increasingly isolated Belogorokhov within the movement. In 2019, many activists tried to candidate for the city council. He did not support this strategy. He lost the confidence in most of the remaining options to continue fighting. At the same period, another leading figure of the movement, Vassiliy Moskovets whom I interviewed on the 6th of March 2019 seemed rather rational and cold-blooded. He explained to me the election campaign StopGOK activists were organising at the time. He had little



doubt that the effort would have a positive outcome. He probably foresaw the difficulties he would encounter as an independent candidate; at the end, his candidacy was, as a few others, rejected by the election committee. Because of that and because of the two-step voting system, nobody made it to the city council. This was not a totally improbable development (see chapter 4.1.2). In March 2019, however, Moskovets preferred spreading optimism and declaring trust in Russia's rule of law guaranteeing him the right to run for office.

In his anger and delusion, Belogorokhov seemed to have become less capable of walking the slim line that is necessary to organise social movements. Despite the knowledge that many essential civil rights merely exist *de jure* (e.g. the right to run for a seat in parliament), it is necessary to insist on being granted those rights. This requires a small rest of faith into the rule of law of Russian institutions. Actions like the paedophilia posters arguably contribute to raising the level of anger so much to destroy this remainder of faith. It can be an effective means to deprive someone of the sangfroid that is necessary to take responsibility in social movements.

## **5.4 Attempts to put StopGOK activists into prison**

### **5.4.1 The hierarchical order of the Russian court system**

How can Russian courts be manipulated by political and economic interests? Social scientists and journalists suspect that there is a causal link between the non-changeability of Russia's executive power and the independence of judges. An indicator for the independence of courts is the number of acquittals. The rate of acquitting verdicts is dropping constantly in the last five years in Russia. In 2018 the quote of acquitting verdicts was at less than 0,3 percent. The acquittal rate for people that do not admit being guilty is at six percent. In 2014, the number of acquittals was almost three times as high. There were no legislative changes concerning the procedure at criminal courts which could explain this sharp and sudden drop. Therefore, the author of a study links it – in a loosely manner – to “the events in Eastern Ukraine, sanctions and the fight with dissent” (Sokolov 2019a). That means, he links it to the solidification of the authoritarian state in Russia.

Observers remark close informal relations between law enforcement authorities and judges, while judges are – by the constitution – supposed to be independent. According to the constitution of 1993, judges are chosen and nominated by commissions of judges themselves. For some higher positions in the judiciary power, the constitution demands confirmation by the president. Putin reinterpreted the president's role in the nomination of judges. According to testimony of former Moscow judges, Olga Yegorova, head of the Moscow City Court (Mosgorsud) and appointed by Putin, gave commands to judges as early as during Putin's first presidential term. Time after time, the presidential administration increased its influence on the court chairmen. Since 2002, the presidential administration nominates chairmen without taking into account proposals of regional parliaments. And those chairmen have a high influence on the whole body. They distribute the incoming cases among the serving judges. By deciding which judge will preside over which case, they can play a decisive role in delicate criminal cases. Chairmen are assisted by so-called curators. Ordinary judges are asked to report to those curators. Important judgements are worded together in cooperation with curators. Courts are also controlled by the Secret Service FSB which – according to information leaked to newspapers – has an own department for the purpose of gathering information on judges and using it (Sokolov 2019b).

But apart from coercion, there is also a high level of voluntary submission to the executive power. This can be explained by the fact that a high percentage of judges previously worked at the law enforcement services. The quota of former law enforcement officials hired as judges vary between 50 percent and 18 percent in the last two decades. An overwhelming number of newly hired judges previously worked as officials in other state institutions. Some

judges that were involved in politically delicate judgements have received their legal education at academies under command of the ministry of the interior. Those educational and professional experiences create a bias in favour of the executive branch. Additionally, surveys show that judges in their offices regularly receive visits from investigators and other police officers. They are voluntarily coordinating their work with other state bodies, not only acting on orders from above. In contrast, judges apparently disobeying orders are often removed from their position. Even though removing judges for an unsanctioned decision is legally impossible, elites often find some formalistic ways nevertheless. In the worst cases, dissenting judges face fabricated criminal cases or a sudden unexpected death occurs under dubious circumstances (Sokolov 2019b).

The hierarchical organisation of the court system is the ground on which people can be persecuted for political reasons. As the following chapter will show, the opportunity to convict oppositional activists is not always given. But it is possible to stretch court proceedings to an absurd length and to leave activists in a long and fearful state of uncertainty.

#### **5.4.2 The case of Boris Zolotarevskiy**

Just like other forms of repression, criminal persecution of StopGOK activists is linked to the work of private security services. At least, this is the case in the criminal process against Boris Zolotarevskiy. Born in April 1997, Zolotarevskiy studied journalism and coordinated the Naval'nyy office in Chelyabinsk. Zolotarevskiy recounts that the fight against the copper mine was an important step in his path to become a professional political activist. When I interviewed him on the 10th of March 2019, he showed me an article about StopGOK he wrote for the student newspaper in 2015. After reporting on the events, he became an engaged participant and finally co-organised the daily picketing in front of the governor's office that was conducted over long periods of 2016 and 2017. He organised Naval'nyy's appearance at a StopGOK rally that had a large impact on the movement's political weight (see chapter 4.2.3). In early summer 2019, he moved to Moscow in order to run the election campaign of Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Naval'nyy's Anti-Corruption Fund who tried to be elected deputy of the Moscow City Council.

As the coordinator of Chelyabinsk's Naval'nyy office, he was one of the few StopGOK activist who professionally worked as a politician, who had the resource to "work on political matters twenty-four seven", as he says.

He describes repressions as an everyday experience. He organised the Chelyabinsk parts of several nationwide actions in the context of Naval'nyy's presidential campaign, as well as the protests against the pension reforms in September 2018. The city considered this

September meetings as an illegal public gathering. Zolotarevskiy received one of the most severe forms of administrative penalties and was taken into custody before the demonstration even started. He was imprisoned for nine days in a special prison for offenders of the administrative law [spetspreemnik] that has slightly less severe conditions than the punitive colonies. Since 2017, he regularly went to the copper mine's construction site and made videos about his encounters with security services:

Local residents started to call me and said that deforestation was started, not only on their [RMK's] territory, but also on neighbouring lands. RMK started to extend its belongings. They drove on their vehicles through the villages and started to frighten people. Local residents simply asked me to come [...]. I came there again and again. After every tour I published a small video report [...] on my youtube channel where I told in first-person what happens, that they are cutting tress for instance, that they were starting to dig a mine.

On the 29th of June 2018, security agents prepared a provocation against Zolotarevskiy that led to a criminal proceeding occupying him for a year:

Zolotarevskiy: On this day, I was supposed to be on air on Ekho Moskvyy. You know they do not often invite opposition activists to a live segment. But at the time, they called for me. In the morning I went to Tomino. I was convinced that I will still make it in time [to the studio]. I shot a video, the guys were pushing me, they were saying: "go away from here!" I said: "No, I don't go, I have the right to be here." They made some rude remarks. I practically ignored all that.

Interviewer: Have you been alone?

Zolotarevskiy: No. I usually go with a cameraman. We were two. At that day, I thought everything will be like always. But I was wrong. They accompanied us on two sides. They were on four quads, a few cars. They simply blocked us from both sides. We could not drive away with our car. We left the car in order to make a video of the blockade. We tried to get some information. But they did not answer questions. We made a statement on video. They tried to disrupt it by loud coughs [...]. They started to push us. When I finished the video, they cleverly pushed into my back, some were kicking against my legs.

The provocation came from a man whom Zolotarevskiy describes as tall and broad-shouldered. Zolotarevskiy claims he has found his page on Vkontakte. According to Zolotarevskiy, the agent provocateur was a former professional boxer. On his Vkontakte page the latter posted information about having fought in Donbass. In the meantime, this page has been deleted and he denies to have been in Donbass. Zolotarevskiy further recalls the events as such:

I wanted to get into the car and he stood there. He made it like a football player. Like Neymar. Essentially, I did not touch him, maybe touch him a bit [...]. He fell down and said: 'Boris, why are you pushing me?' He screamed that he has been hurt in the back. Then he stood up and jumped as if nothing had happened. He climbed onto a quad, kept on putting a camera into my face.

Zolotarevskiy says that he also reported the harassment to the police. He did not hear about any legal consequences for the security staff. However, a criminal investigation against him was opened up. The case went to court, where the sessions went over half a year – from January to July 2019. At the end, he was acquitted. As explained in the previous chapter, this

is a very rare and improbable scenario. Because of the high unpredictability of court proceedings, Zolotarevskiy feared to be put in jail for several months:

To be honest, I expected that they will detain me directly. The judge often comes to a court and says: ‘Do you have some witnesses with you? The ones that are here we are going to interrogate. All the other witnesses we will not call to court in order to not waste time. The sentence will be written today as well. Let us save time.’ Therefore, I went to the first session in court with a big suitcase. I supposed that they could imprison me right on this day for three or four months. [...] My girlfriend filled me a suitcase with towels, slippers and everything that you need in prison. It is on my doorway.”

Additionally, Zolotarevskiy testifies that police officers threatened him several times that he could be sentenced and put into prison: “They called me [to the police] and said: ‘you can have the same fate as Asatullin.’ ‘Maybe you want to become the Il’dar Dadin<sup>13</sup> of Chelyabinsk?’ Those kinds of questions they ask.”

Zolotarevskiy won the case for two reasons. Firstly, the court sessions were frequented by a large audience, many of them StopGOK supporters. “So many people came to the first court session as I have never seen before in our court”, says Zolotarevskiy, “The whole building was crowded. People were standing in the hallway because the courtroom was fully occupied.” This societal pressure created the transparency that make the conditions for an obscure sentence very hard. Secondly, the evidence was overwhelmingly strong in his favour. RMK’s security service employees that appeared as witnesses were uncoordinated and unprepared. Their testimonies contradicted each other; they failed to bring video testimony to court, even though some of them were filming during the incident. Zolotarevskiy, in contrast, brought up his own videos which make it clear that he was pushed and hustled by RMK security forces.

During the process, however, Zolotarevskiy could not be sure that he will be acquitted, even though the process seemed to go well for him. When I interviewed him in March 2019, in the midst of the process, his fear of being imprisoned was justified: “They [RMK security forces] behave themselves very quiet, as if everything was bought in advance. They already have some agreement.” Although the attempt to bring Zolotarevskiy into prison eventually failed, it must be considered a serious coercion. It nearly deprived Zolotarevskiy of his civic freedoms. Furthermore, the necessity to defend himself in court entailed large costs for Zolotarevskiy. He needed to dedicate time and resources, mobilise support. Depending on a person’s character, it could have had a seriously intimidating effect.

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<sup>13</sup> Il’dar Dadin was the first of so far two men who received a prison sentence for the repeated participation in non-sanctioned political rallies. A prison term is foreseen by article 212.1 in Russia’s criminal code. He reported to have been tortured in a punitive colony in Karelia. After having served 15 month of his prison term, he was released after a ruling of Russia’s constitutional court judging article 212.1 as partly unconstitutional.

Zolotarevskiy moved to Moscow in Summer 2019. After the Moscow Duma elections, he continued to work in the Moscow office of Naval'nyy's Anti-Corruption Fund. In Moscow he gave a speech at a rally on 10th of August 2019 in front of 50.000 people that demanded the admission of independent candidates to the Moscow city elections. He is a prospective young politician, a potentially important figure in Russia's nationwide opposition which partly explains the strong repressive means applied against him. It can be interpreted as early preventive repression, as attempts to make him rethink his political ambitions.

#### **5.4.3 Further criminal investigations, their cause and effect**

A second criminal process that can be considered as politically motivated concerns two dedicated StopGOK activists. In the night between the 10th and 11th of September 2017, StopGOK activists Gamil' Asatullin and Yevgeniy Medvedev put fire to a small security hut at the entrance of the copper mine construction site. They raised a banner that read "You will all die" and "Give us back the money" trying to pretend that the assault was made by unpaid workers at the construction site. No persons were harmed.

The police found the suspects on the same day. Medvedev was put under house arrest. Activists broke with him, realising that he worked as an agent provocateur who joined the movement in order to initiate such an action. Sergey Belogorokhov says that Medvedev repeatedly suggested to singled-out activists to take up actions without discussing it in a larger group.

Asatullin was taken into custody for half a year. In custody, he was pressed to do without his lawyer, he was pressed to testify against leading figures of StopGOK claiming that they orchestrated the assault. In favour of Asatullin, StopGOK activists started up a solidarity campaign. They collected money for his family, wrote letters to him in prison and were present at the court proceedings. Among the activists I spoke to, many considered Asatullin's assault as wrong. Nevertheless, there is a general understanding that he could be psychologically manipulated. Zolotarevskiy says:

They play with a person's psychology, with some kind of weaknesses. They try to trick him, play with his anger. You know, when I go to Tomino, this really starts to anger me. This is a normal human emotion. You know, it is not easy for anyone who goes through these emotions. If there is someone next to them who says: 'Come on, let us not only talk about this, let's do something more radical. Let us act like men. Let us do something more serious.' In a certain moment, in a certain psychological state of mind, this can have an effect.

Autumn 2017 was a frustrating period for StopGOk activists. After Naval'nyy appeared at a StopGOK rallye, the level of repression significantly increased, people were regularly interrogated at the prosecutor's office. In June, the construction of the copper mine began.

Activists' attempts to build a protest camp at the construction site failed as they were chased away by RMK security forces whose illegal use of violence remained without consequences. Having those experiences in mind, the StopGOK activists I spoke to understand Asatullin's vulnerability, his exposure for psychological manipulation.

During the investigations, the police raided apartments of several leading figures of the movement. Those raids are remembered as very brutal. Sergey Belogorokhov says to be held onto the ground at the entrance of his apartment while police forces entered his building. Activists were called to the prosecutor's office. Law enforcement authorities actively investigated many leading StopGOK in the aftermath. Seemingly, they tried to extend the criminal process to other activists. In a first process only Asatullin and Medvedev were charged. In 2018 the process came to an end due to formal mistakes committed by the prosecutor. The end of the process led to Asatullin's release from custody.

A new attempt to persecute Asatullin and Medvedev was made in early 2019. RMK newly calculated the damage caused by the fire claiming that it was significantly higher. This legally opened up the possibility of a new investigation. This time, Vassiliy Moskovets is among the accused. The case came to court in autumn 2019. Moskovets is accused of having initiated an act of hooliganism [khuliganstvo]. As of January 2020, the process is ongoing. Activists explain this second process by pointing to Moskovets' ambition to run for political offices in 2019. He led efforts to establish independent candidacies for the elections of the Chelyabinsk city council. As one of the most visible and charismatic figures of StopGOK, he would have had good chances to be elected at least to the municipal council, if the election commission had not rejected his candidacy. While I was present at an organisational meeting of ecological activists in Chelyabinsk, it became clear that Moskovets has a central role in the scene of opposition-minded environmentalists. His contributions to the discussions show that he has wide experience in negotiating with officials, a profound knowledge of ecological laws and clear ideas of political strategies. In this sense, efforts to bring Moskovets into prison can be understood in the framework of the threat model. He is one of the most effective local environmental activists and, as such, potentially causes harm to political and business elites.

Yet it must also be taken into account that there are even more criminal investigations against environmental activists that might have other goals. A similar goal might have had the criminal investigation opened up against Irina Poletavkina who works as a gardener and who is an outspoken StopGOK activist who regularly takes responsibility in organising demonstrations. During a rally in January 2018, she talked on stage about illnesses of her

relatives that live in Varna, 30km away from Mikheevskiy GOK, another RMK-owned copper mine and processing plant in Chelyabinskaya Oblast'. She proposed that her relatives' illnesses are caused by sulphur dust coming from the processing plant. She stated that Mikheevskiy GOK makes the local population suffer. As a consequence, the manager of Mikheevskiy GOK reported her at the regional department of the MVD, the ministry of the interior, accusing her of defamation. She was called to an interrogation but refused to testify. This was also used as an occasion to call several activists to the police, to ask them for testimony. In autumn 2018 several activists, among them Sergey Belogorokhov and Vassiliy Moskovets, that were present at the rally in January, were interrogated by the police. Poletavkina says that the police tried to provoke testimonies against her. As we spoke in March 2019, the criminal investigation has not been closed, but neither was it brought to court. "They are stretching it," Poletavkina says.

In July 2019, a criminal investigation has been opened up against Galina Gorina. The pensioner, born in 1960, is investigated against for her behaviour on social media. She has shared content on a terrorist attack on the FSB residency in Arkhangel'sk in November 2018. She is charged with an article sanctioning extremist propaganda and the justification of terrorism. During a raid, she has been stripped off her phone and her computer. After an interrogation in July 2019, she suffered from a breakdown and was hospitalised. She suffers from Asthma, which she links to the air pollution in the city. She is steadily involved in the StopGOK movement, she goes to court sessions, to rallies and pickets. But, in contrast to Poletavkina and Moskovets, she plays no role as a leading figure in the movement. Her lawyer, Andrey Lepekhin, part of the civil rights lawyer network Agora, said in an interview that the case against her is probably linked to her civic activism (Efimova 2019). This shows that law enforcement authorities do not exclusively target key figures of the movement. Criminal persecution can also concern grassroots members.

Especially Asatullin's case shows that StopGOK activists need to mobilise many resources if singled-out activists face legal persecution. Most often, this act of solidarity is described very emotionally as a sign of a movement's strength. In reality, it weakens a movements as it is binding resources. If a collective body spends all its time to defend its civil rights, it has no more time to use them.

## **6 Conclusion**

Chapters 4 and 5 have opened up a panorama of distinct repressive measures applied against the social movement StopGOK: suppressing information, manipulation and control of media, restricting the accessibility of public urban spaces, the application of the "foreign agent law",



dismissals related to politics, blocking environmentalists from taking part in elections, exerting physical and psychological violence and finally the criminal persecution of StopGOK activists.

Repressive measures have been applied constantly during the whole period of the conflict; the suppression of information started was an effort to prevent public protests against copper mining. The most intense phase of the conflict was probably in 2017. At the time, the question whether Tominskiy GOK will be built seemed still widely undecided. National politicians, Naval'nyy and Putin, became openly involved in the conflict. While the fate of Tominskiy GOK was unclear, the level of repression increased significantly. Until today, as of January 2020, criminal persecutions against StopGOK persist. Repression is ubiquitous. It has been exposed multiple times how those repressive measures succeed in weakening the social movement: I discussed how psychological pressure makes people exaggeratedly angry and can lead to isolation within the movement. Moreover, I presented the case of an 18-year-old student whom I asked about his personal relation to the future copper mine next to his home village. "If it becomes really bad, you can still leave", he said. This can be interpreted as rationalised fear. He does not even consider the option of protest. The rather costly option of leaving the home he and his family have built up by themselves seems to be the easier, more rational choice to him.

Repression, thus, is an essential cause for the (probable) defeat of the StopGOK movement. Two other important causes have only marginally been discussed in this analysis: 1) poverty and economic distress: surviving is the first concern to many citizens in the region. Civic engagement remains a privilege to pensioners and people with secured income. 2) Regardless of repressions as such, many citizens seem to perceive the Russian state as unresponsive to their needs and demands. People do not see a possible impact of raising protest.

We determined three main agents of repressive actions: a) regional economic elites, b) regional political elites, c) national political elites.

a) With the help of private security forces, regional economic elites, namely the Russian Copper Company, openly exert a regime of violence and intimidation in the villages near Tominskiy GOK. Security forces in the tradition of the 1990's violence entrepreneurs affected the outcome of public hearings and undermine activists' work in the fields. Furthermore, RMK might have informal ties to local persecutor's office by which it can initiate or stop criminal persecutions. This kind of commercially applied repression has hardly been exposed in the sociological literature on repression.

b) Regional political elites are probably the most conflicted and ambiguous group. On the one hand, they are tightly intertwined with economic elites. Regional political elites brought forward the approval procedure of Tominskiy GOK accepting questionable procedures, as for instance the intimidation before public hearings. On the other hand, to a certain extent, environmentalists have well-working relationships to regional officials, as Dmitriy Zakarlyukin underlines. Some local press articles also allow to conclude that regional officials at the police and the nature protection agencies can be seriously interested in solving environmental problems, but often hindered in their work (“Oni i ne ponyali...” 2019). Russia’s environmental legislation foresees high obstacles for effective interventions of nature protection agencies. An effort coordinated with many different state authorities would be necessary to effectively control big enterprises’ environmental impact. This coordination often fails, as it lacks the unanimity of regional politicians, prosecutors and nature protection agencies.

c) In the aftermath of the Bolotnaya protests in 2011/ 2012 and some defeats of United Russia in regional elections, the Russian government, the presidential administration and the parliament made elections less competitive and implemented new repressive tools, most notably the “foreign agent law”. Thereby, national elites – willingly or unwillingly – created the grounds for many repressive measures applied in Chelyabinsk. For the Kremlin, this can only be partly satisfying. The legislation passed in the aftermath of Bolotnaya arguably had the goal to weaken the social base of the national opposition which threatens the ruling elite in the Kremlin in Moscow. The case-study in Chelyabinsk shows that it can also be enforced in the fight of regional elites against social movements. Thus, it also weakens the Kremlin’s possibility to control regional elites. This is a probably unintended side effect of the Post-Bolotnaya policies. It indirectly weakens the centre of the power vertical.

But the Moscow executive branch also played an active role in the conflict. A member of the Russian government is reported to actively lobby for Tominskiy GOK on a national level (Kustikova 2018). Putin’s own words also can be read as a justification for a severe treatment of environmental activists: „Ecological organisations are sometimes used by our competitors in order to hold down [pritopit‘] growing segments of the Russian infrastructure.” (see chapter 5.1) In a semi-public manner Putin personally intervened into the copper mine conflict by calling the environmental activist Vassiliy Moskovets. On the one hand, this intervention had a moderating effect, as it is said to have decreased the level of repression, at least temporarily. On the other hand, in a deceiving manner, Putin made a case in favour of the copper mine.

Chapter 3.1 has exposed that the Southern Ural suffers from a complex heritage of ecological problems – from toxic air to nuclear radiation and to the threat of water shortages – that do not just go away with time, but are difficult to solve. Especially chapter 4.1 has shown why environmental conflicts and problems are so difficult to face in Russia's dictatorship. The nature protection agency is under-funded. For regional elites, it is often convenient to deny problems as long as it is possible. Unfortunately, it is within the nature of ecological challenges that they can be denied quite easily, e.g. by refusing to fund research on health hazards. In contrast to covering up corruption or fraudulent elections, covering up ecological problems mostly does not require any active deed, passivity suffices: not to collect plausible data, not to provide impartial scientific expertise.

The study has thus shown to some extent that Russia's authoritarian system is unable to forward responsible environmental policies. However, an argument in favour of this thesis could have been made more systematically than it was made in the framework of this case-study. The copper mine conflict analysed here is actually an example where independent experts managed to expose potential ecological dangers at least partially; it is an example where a relatively large amount of information on ecological risks exists and is also accessible.

In order to show the systematic disadvantages of Russia's dictatorship on the field of environmental policy, additional evidence needs to be taken into account: as for instance the fatal nuclear accident that happened at a military base in Archangel'skaya Oblast'. In the aftermath of a deadly blast, the government suppressed all information about radiation levels in the area and in wide parts of Siberia: Monitoring stations that measure several kinds of nuclear radiation were shut down in many parts of Russia. Thus, the exact nature of emitted radiation could not be confirmed. Civilian doctors and nurses that treated several people wounded from the blast had to sign non-disclosure agreements. The health ministry confiscated all documents that kept record of treating the blast victims. These records will probably not be released any time soon (Kravtsova 2019). As a consequence of this lack of information, the public outcry was small. Even though in the digital era it is almost impossible to hide these disasters completely, the government was largely successful in preventing widespread outrage.

The downplaying and underestimation of ecological conflicts in Russia could also be shown by reviewing the state reports on the state of the environment which are annually published by the federal ministry for natural resources and the environment, as well as by many regional ministries or agencies. A careful read of those documents would probably lead to

the conclusion that the data given in the reports are insufficient and superficial in comparison to other countries' efforts to provide information on the state of the environment.

The study has exposed a significant legal injustice: In the Russian hinterland, copper businessmen create and exploit situations of lawlessness in their favour; whereas at the same time they export to countries of the European Union, found offshore funds in Cyprus, thus profiting from its rule of law and its stable currency. I argue that a company that profits from corruption and lawlessness and thus also hardens those circumstances should not be entitled to the advantages of European rule of law. I hope that this study gives some ground to debate how legislation can be changed in this respect.

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## Attachment

### Interview with Andrey Talevlin, Chelyabinsk, 4 March 2019

Лукас Лац: По профессии, если я не ошибаюсь, вы адвокат?

Андрей Талевлин: Нет. Я юрист, кандидат наук, преподаю экологическое право в государственном университете.

Л: Также я читал, что вы член Общественного совета «Росатом». Это так?

А: Я нахожусь в составе рабочей группы при Общественном совете «Росатома» по вопросам обращения с радиоактивными отходами.

Л: Может ли рабочая группа оказывать какое-то влияние?

А: Да. Она как раз создавалась для того, чтобы в регионах... [проконтролировать действия «Росатома»?] Мы знали, какие процессы происходят в «Росатоме», ведь Челябинск — это же суператомный регион. Здесь много предприятий, в основном они военные. Я занимаюсь этой темой уже очень долго, лет 18. Моя научная работа связана с правом регулирования радиоактивных отходов. Поэтому я давно занимаюсь. И мы как эксперты в этой группе делаем анализ документов, подсказываем, узнаём информацию, участвуем во всех общественных обсуждениях, высказываем свою точку зрения, показываем, где неправильно всё это делается. Я против атомной энергетики, но радиоактивные отходы остаются, и с ними надо что-то делать. Поэтому мы в этой сфере участвуем.

Л: Вы были председателем фонда, который был признан иностранным агентом.

А: Да.

Л: Это было в 2013 году?

А: В 2015-м. Да, эту организацию признали иностранным агентом. Но у меня было две организации.

Л: Движение и фонд.

А: Да. Мы сделали это специально для того, чтобы... Думали, что обезопасим себя от этого процесса. Потому что у движения не было ни денег, ни счетов в банке, ни имущества. Но мы уступали в суде от движения. Дело мы выиграли как раз по Русской Медной компании по Томинскому ГОКу.

Л: Они жаловались на то, что вы будете признаны иностранным агентом.

А: Да, они пожаловались. Мы в арбитражном суде у них выиграли дело. (наше движение «За природу») Мы хотели провести общественно-экологическую экспертизу этого проекта. Причём мы часто делали. Подали заявку — они нам не дали документы. Мы подали в арбитражный суд и выиграли это дело. Суд обязал предоставить. Но в это же время они пошли другим путём: обратились к ФСБ, минуя, что мы иностранные агенты. Нас закрыли. И организацию потом ликвидировали в суде. Мы не смогли в суде требовать у них какие-то документы. Вот такие процессы интересные идут. И сейчас я ещё сопредседатель российского экологического союза. Есть такая организация РСОЭС, и я один из сопредседателей.

Л: Мне сказали, что вы один из основателей движения «Стоп ГОК», насколько это правильно?

А: Ну да, так получилось. Я, честно говоря, одним из первых узнал эту информацию. И мы начали исследовать эту тему. Мои статьи были первыми на эту тему. Когда узнали, хотели сразу провести общественную экологическую экспертизу. И, по сути, возникло движение «Стоп ГОК».

Л: Я ещё не очень понял, как вы могли обнаружить, что там планировали ГОК.

А: Это было интересно. Я ещё состою в партии «Яблоко». И у нас недалеко живёт фермер. Он приехал из Томинского и сказал, что у них были слушания. Вы знаете что-нибудь вообще об этом?

Л: Слушания?

А: Да, первые общественные слушания. Там присутствовало мало людей, меньше восьмидесяти. Мы ничего не знали. Начали копать эту историю. Обнаружили вот эту вот штуку. Я написал статью большую про это и её подхватили журналисты здесь. И мы начали дальше и дальше искать эту информацию и находить очень много интересных документов.

А: И это было в 2013 году?

Л: Да, это было в 2013 году, и на базе нашего офиса в декабре мы уже провели общественное слушание, которое организовали сами. По законодательству общественная организация, в данном случае движение «За природу», может самостоятельно проводить общественные слушания. Мы их организовали, сделали положение. Всех пригласили прийти. Пришло 200 с лишним человек. После этого возникло движение.

Л: Был какой-то момент, когда движение стало гораздо сильнее развиваться?

А: Ну мы начинали с того, что... Во-первых, мы начали ездить по близлежащим деревням и рассказывать эту информацию, которую никто не знал. Собирались в школах, ездили в администрацию, встречались с бизнесменами. В первый год мы просто занимались просветительством, уезжали каждые выходные. Договаривались, где с жителями разговаривать, что вот такая ситуация будет. Ну и параллельно движение начали: и общественно-экологическую экспертизу, и начали требовать документы. То есть первый год был направлен на распространение информации.

Л: В субботу я разговаривал с немногими активистами, раздающими листовки на улице. Они сказали, что вступили в движение в 2015 году. Тогда был какой-то важный момент?

А: В 2015 году уже движение было мощное. О нас знало большое количество. Мы собирали подписи петиций. В интернете сейчас уже 200 с лишним тысяч подписей. И мы начали ощущать противодействие: в марте 2015-го ликвидировали все мои организации.

Л: Это было связано?

А: Да, конечно. У меня в протоколе про ликвидацию написано: «Противодействие строительству Томинского ГОКа». Это в официальном документе в суде: первая претензия, которую мне предъявили, — то, что наша организация занималась политической деятельностью. Много статей уже вышло, большое количество. Мы делали всё: мы инициировали референдум, дошли до депутатов, а депутаты зарубили эту инициативу в Сосновском районе. Делали всё. И сейчас Володя Казанцев занимается в судах от новой организации уже. Мы все права движения «За природу» передали новой организации. И сейчас председатель — Володя Казанцев. Он занимается в судах, помогаем. Ну сейчас уже, к сожалению, решение принято. Томинский ГОК строится. Вырублены огромные площади лесов. Некоторые вещи из того, что мы делали здесь, были сделаны впервые в России. Первый коллективный иск подписали четыре тысячи человек. Это очень много. В России такого еще не было. И митинги были, и работа с экспертами, и с документами. Много чего было. Но, к сожалению, нам не удалось остановить этот проект.

Л: По-вашему, движение «Стоп ГОК» — что-то уникальное в России?

А: Я считаю, что да, потому что мы попробовали все возможные инструменты: и обращение к президенту, и референдум, и общественно-экологическую экспертизу.

Л: Что касается давления РМК, вас в университете когда-то предупреждали, что могут уволить?

А: Были угрозы. Дело в том, что тот, кто сейчас министр экологии, он работал в моём университете. Мы с ним коллеги, на разных факультетах. А он за строительство Томинского ГОКа. И он ходил жаловаться к моему начальству. Писали очень много материалов в средствах массовой информации, что я иностранный агент, всякую ерунду. Всё, что там насобирали. Одно время было, но сейчас нет. Но никто меня не уволил.

Л: Почему это вас не испугало? Такие угрозы. Вы это не воспринимали серьёзно?

А: Ну... я не знаю. Может быть и серьёзно, может и несерьёзно. Наверное, серьёзно. От своих принципов я не собираюсь отказываться. Это же вещи принципиальные. Я специалист. Я знаю последствия. Могу всё посмотреть и вижу, к чему это приведёт.

Л: Тоже мне сказали, что РМК начинал покупать медиа в городе.

А: У нас по сути независимых медиа сейчас нет. В России уникальная ситуация, потому что большинство СМИ не финансируются за счёт рекламы, как в других странах. Большинство их бюджета — это государственные деньги. Поэтому, и, во-первых, этот фактор, официальная позиция: строить ГОК, и во-вторых, РМК заключила со многими договоры. Просто купили, и они не стали говорить по средствам массовой информации.

Л: Но это не так очевидно, что они купили. Это, наверное, не прямо доказывается?

А: Здесь такой ещё момент. Половина СМИ принадлежала и принадлежит предыдущему губернатору Михаилу Юревичу. А он начинал этот проект, и мы подозреваем, что он в доле с РМК, потому что Алтушкин — его хороший друг. Но сейчас у него проблемы, против него уголовное дело, и он в Англии скрывается. Начинал это он. И половина СМИ принадлежит ему в Челябинске.

Л: Какие СМИ?

А: «Эхо Москвы», «31-й канал», ряд газет, например, «Вечерний Челябинск». Очень сложно. Но мы пробили эту стену: о нас писали федеральные СМИ и зарубежные СМИ. То есть эту проблему мы как-то решили, потому что и помогали федеральные сайты, сначала подключился Гринпис, потом совет по правам человека, а там половина из Гринписа. То есть информационную блокаду как таковую мы пробили. Кроме того, после того как в предвыборную кампанию президент позвонил одному из лидеров Василию Московец, здесь уже информация распространена была. Все знали об этом. Это мы как-то преодолели. Да, местные СМИ они неохотно пишут. Хотя странная позиция, журналисты живут здесь. И принципы журналистики — быть независимым. Но, к сожалению, деньги делают свое дело.

Л: Являются ли открытыми экспертизы, которые были написаны? Потому что я очень долго искал в интернете, но никаких официальных заключений о том, что можно строить ГОК, не нашел.

А: Нет. Есть все документы.

Л: И они доступны?

А: Да, заключения, государственные экологические экспертизы. Всё доступно. Мы собрали очень много документов на нашем сайте «За природу». Можно зайти посмотреть все эти заключения. Документов очень много. Есть много сайтов по этой теме. И группа ВКонтакте, и в Фейсбуке, в социальных сетях можно посмотреть. Мы же их практически заставили все документы сделать и переделать. Они же переделывали проект уже три раза. По каждому проекту есть заключение. Есть разрешение на строительство, договоры аренды лесов. Все документы известны — по крайней мере, нам всё известно.

Л: Что вы думаете о сотрудничестве с либеральными СМИ в России?

А: В данный период я считаю, это важно, потому что средства массовой информации играют большую роль. Их не так много осталось. Из федеральных можно по пальцам пересчитать, какие остались. Конечно, «Коммерсант», «Новая газета», их не так много.

Л: Я спросил, потому что человек в Гринписе достаточно сильно ругался на либеральные СМИ. Он сказал, что там много людей, которые, к примеру, не верят в изменение климата. Но вы думаете, что они вам помогли?

А: Ну, «Новая газета» очень хорошие статьи писала, очень хорошие, грамотные и скрупулёзные. Понятно, что у них могут быть разные точки зрения на изменение климата. Но в основном они пишут... Для нас они нормальную статью писали. Но и многие сайты: [activatica.org](http://activatica.org) постоянно пишут. У иностранных СМИ очень много материалов было про Томинский ГОК, и норвежские, и немецкие, и английские, каких только не было. Но, к сожалению, ничего не помогло. Наверное, всё-таки это из-за слабой активности самих челябинцев. В эту субботу я был на митинге в Миассе. Там тоже против [другого] ГОКа... Там было около трёх тысяч человек для такого маленького города, где живёт — сколько там? — 160 тысяч? Ну две с половиной тысячи — это очень много для 160 тысяч. Мы в лучшем случае набирали столько в пятнадцатом году. Но, извините, в Челябинске живёт миллион человек.

Л: Сколько вы собирали?

А: Не больше трёх тысяч. То есть это слабая активность. А в тех городах — они собирают.

Л: И почему здесь активность так слаба?

А: Ну я могу только предположить.

Л: Давайте.

А: Ну, во-первых, тот же Миасс — это маленький город, и там нет добывающих производств в основном, это индустрия машиностроения. Там люди живут более высокого образования, технического. Там находится российский ракетный центр, там автозавод. Там в основном машиностроение. Они образованнее, и соответственно, наверное, у этих людей экологическая культура повыше. Во-вторых, в большинстве случаев это люди, которые несколько поколений, коренные. То есть они там родились, их отцы и деды там родились. И у них есть контраст, потому что они рядом с такими уникальными природными объектами, как озеро Тургояк, Ильменский заповедник. Это всё рядом. Там дышится очень легко. Угрозы они острее чувствуют. В Челябинске в основном металлургия, дышать нечем, большинство приезжих. Может быть, поэтому. Я могу ошибаться.

Л: Люди просто привыкли?

А: Привыкли — раз, угрозы не видят — два. Большинство приехало сюда — три. И поэтому они, мне кажется, более равнодушные к этим проблемам. Но это моя точка зрения.

Л: Как вы оцените сегодняшний этап борьбы? Вы сказали, что ГОК строится. Это уже невозможно изменить?

А: Ну, менять надо. Нет, я оптимист. Я считаю, что возможно. Во-первых, у них большая проблема с водой, потому что какой они проект хотят сделать, им нужно большое количество воды, которой нет. И они не знают, где взять. Планируют взять из питьевой артерии — реки Миасс. И мы постараемся не позволить этого сделать. Во-вторых, экономическая ситуация может измениться в любой момент. То есть это же тоже деньги, это же нужно посчитать. Сейчас наша задача — сделать проект экономически нерентабельным, заставить их просто посчитать и, скажем так, повысить стоимость этого проекта, чтобы они сами отказались от него. Поэтому есть планы, что делать. Мы знаем следующие шаги.

Л: Вчера мы обсуждали хвостохранилище. И как я понял, его не будет на территории Томинского ГОКа.



А: Да. Хвостохранилище будет, но не таких объёмов, каких они планировали раньше. То есть они планировали 340 000 кубических метров. Это очень большое хвостохранилище — дамба только 90 метров. Сейчас они планируют меньше построить и транспортировать хвосты. Им вода всё равно нужна, поэтому водохранилище и хвостохранилище — всё равно им нужно. Основные хвосты они хотят транспортировать за пятнадцать километров в другой карьер, который уже существует. Это очень проблематично. Им большее количество воды нужно.

Л: Хвосту нужно течь до хвостохранилища?

А: Да. Я боюсь, что они могут вернуться к первоначальному проекту. Вот что самое страшное.

Л: Они писали на их сайте, что это будет избегать лесные пожары в таком другом карьере. Это простая ложь что ли?

А: Это просто предлог, потому что пожары можно и другими способами потушить. Необязательно за пятнадцать километров пульпу валить туда. Есть другие технологии рекультивации. Это не основное, это не панацея от всех этих бед. Можно другими способами более дешевыми и эффективными всё это делать. Главное для них — построить ГОК.

Л: Вчера я был в Томине. Там люди были очень закрытые. Кроме двух человек, никто не хотел совсем со мной говорить. Они сразу выбегали. Вы можете сказать, изменилось ли настроение проживающих там людей? Это было когда-то по-другому?

А: Ну, вначале всё было по-другому. Когда мы узнали об этом, мы встречались со всеми депутатами в Томино. Их было всего десять человек. И они сказали: «Мы этого не позволим». Мы помогли им сделать документы, они отменили слушания. В следующий раз этих депутатов не избрали. Там же было ещё несколько общественных обсуждений. И Русская медная компания просто пригоняла туда автобусы молодых спортсменов, которые запугивали население. То есть они видят, какие процессы там происходят. А когда хотели сделать лагерь протеста, охрана просто перекрывала дороги, действовала безобразно. Мне кажется, что они напуганы. Они не чувствуют защиту и уверенность в завтрашнем дне, поэтому не хотят разговаривать.

Л: Мне кажется, что есть два вида давления: давление государства и компании. Какое у них взаимоотношение? Они в чём-то отличаются?

А: Да нет. Ну как, отличаются, естественно. Но они действуют в одних целях. К сожалению, это действительность современной России.

Л: Они сотрудничают?

А: Конечно. И правоохранные органы устраивают провокации. К сожалению, это действительность России, когда у нас олигархи занимаются только выкачиванием ресурсов. В Челябинске столько было раньше заводов. Машиностроением никто не занимается. Они хотят лёгкие деньги, выкачать ресурсы, продать их, и, к сожалению, используют государственные органы, государственный механизм в своих целях. Это особенно заметно в регионах, потому что у всех собственников дома в Англии, во Франции, семьи у них живут там. Они захватили власть и, следовательно, все органы власти: милицию, полицию, суды. Такая тенденция. Эти люди, кто хочет вывозить отсюда медь, не связывают свою жизнь с Челябинском. И даже с Россией. У нас интересы разные. Мы хотим здесь жить нормально. Они хотят побольше денег за счёт природных ресурсов.

Л: У меня больше нет вопросов. Сергей Белогорохов мне рассказал, как РМК в некоторых случаях обращался к работодателям активистов, чтобы они их уволили.

А: Да-да, было. Это Русская медная компания вместе с сотрудниками правоохранных органов.

Л: Вы знаете какой-то конкретный случай, кого можно об этом спросить?

А: У Володи Казанцева можно об этом узнать. Его ходили, просили там не работать. Дальше Юрий Черкасов. И сам Белогорохов Сергей тоже давление испытывал, очень серьёзно против него распространяли всю эту информацию. Василий Московец, у него жена судья была. Они действовали грязными способами по всем фронтам, в том числе для того, чтобы лишить источника дохода, по большому счёту. Моя ситуация в университете тоже была пограничная. Слава богу, что получилось.

Л: Что там именно случилось? Ваш начальник вам об этом говорил?

А: Да, да. Просто его просили. Слава богу, что я там работаю давно. У меня там своя репутация. Шестнадцать лет я в университете работаю. Всё нормально получилось. Кого ещё назвать... Пожалуй, вот все основные названы, против которых вели. Ещё провокация, которая была с поджогом-то, знаете эту историю? Уголовное дело Медведева знаете?

Л: Да, я об этом знаю.

А: Это же тоже грязная технология. Самая большая проблема — то, что они используют государственные органы, которые живут за счёт средств налогоплательщиков, в своих целях. Это совсем ужасно.

Л: Спасибо. У меня больше нет вопросов. Вы хотите что-нибудь добавить?

А: Да нет, по большому счёту нет. Будем надеяться. У меня, кстати, очень хороший опыт работы с вашими депутатами из «Бундестага».

Л: С кем вы познакомились?

А: Мы с Фёдей в 2011 году сделали очень хорошую конференцию о радиационной атмосфере. И два члена «Бундестага» сюда приезжали. У нас на сайте есть. Сейчас скажу.

Л: Из какой партии? Зелёной?

А: По-моему, социалисты. Но это было уже давно.

## Interview with Irina Poletavkina, Chelyabinsk, 11 March 2019

Лукас Лац: Мне иногда показалось, что люди мне не доверяют здесь.

Ирина Полетавкина: Вполне может быть. Я такая доверчивая тоже. Привыкли к тому, что провокации со стороны Медной Компании были. У нас людей подставили. Я с этим человеком, с провокатором общалась.

Л: Господин Медведев?

И: Да. То есть даже в голове не укладывалось, что такое может быть.

Л: Он вел себя как нормальный человек?

И: Абсолютно! Даже никакой мысли не возникло о том, что человек может подставить просто других, просто быть провокатором. Правда, он мне не задавал никаких вопросов там что-то как-то. Ну, видать, определённая цель была, чтобы именно дискредитировать. Я, наверное, просто не подходила поэтому.

Л: И если вдруг иностранец приедет, люди думают, что это снова может быть какой-нибудь провокатор?

И: У нас люди в принципе закрытые, все такие серые ходят, они все замученные. Первая мысль у большинства: «Что сделать, чтоб покушать? Как кредит заплатить? Как за квартиру заплатить?» Я посчитала свою зарплату, у меня получается обязательных платежей — это две третьих. А на одну треть как-то нужно что-то купить: например, одежду, обувь, какие-то текущие расходы плюс продукты.

Л: Что является двумя третьими?

И: Ну, грубо говоря, я получаю сумму какую-то, то большая часть две трети, уходит на обязательные платежи — это квартира, кредит, например, бензин на машину, собак покормить, кошек. Я их никуда не дену. У меня две собаки.

Л: Вы хотите сказать, что люди закрытые, потому что жизнь тяжела?

И: Да, прижимает. Очень хорошо летом. Лето как-то сглаживает это всё. Особенно, когда побудешь в лесу, расслабишься. Самое главное, чтоб живы были близкие. А потом осознаешь, что это в общем-то на первом месте. Ну естественно хочется, если наша проблема возникла, переезжать из города куда-то. Как я маму здесь оставлю? 85 лет. У нас здесь все родственники. Я же не брошу её здесь. Мне хоть как придётся здесь жить. А перевозить стариков — это очень проблематично. Они умирают в таком возрасте. Это очень тяжело.

Л: Вы по профессии кто?

И: Я по профессии инженер-педагог швейного производства. Но я не работаю по профессии, к сожалению. Я работаю садовником, цветочницей.

Л: Как это получилось? Здесь так много инженеров, что нельзя устроиться?

И: В своё время я мечтала устроиться по профессии, я хотела быть мастером в училище или техникуме, чтоб девчонки группы преподавать, чтоб им показывать всё это. Не было мест рабочих. Как раз, получается, я в каком году, в 2000 каком я закончила, кризис такой, что не было рабочих мест по профессии. Я состояла на учёте в службе занятости. Устроилась менеджером в одну фирму. Потом пыталась на себя поработать. Но это нереально. У нас малый бизнес убивают. Даже с учётом того, что я специализировалась на товарах отечественного производства. То есть именно для того, чтобы расширить отечественное производство. Керамика различная цветочная. Нет. Аренда и налоги такие высокие. Ничего не остаётся.

Л: Я очень много читаю про разные экологические аварии здесь, в области. Вы здесь родились и выросли?

И: Да, я здесь родилась. И мама тоже у меня отсюда.

Л: Меня шокировала авария...

И: Маяк?

Л: Да. Когда вы об этом услышали в первый раз?

И: Это очень серьёзная авария. Знаешь, это было не так давно. Потому что об этом всё молчалось. Сколько? Мне было, наверное, лет 15. У меня подружка к бабушке приезжала раньше, мы проезжали как раз реку Теча. То есть мы в принципе уже знали, но не столько, сколько мы знаем сейчас.

Л: Я читал, что официально известно это стало в 1989 году.

И: Да, да. Некоторые знали там, что было. Но об этом запрещено было говорить. Просто эта катастрофа посильнее, чем Чернобыль была на самом деле, что касается радиационного фонда, хвост вот этот вот... Если хочешь по этому поводу, у нас есть Оксана Юрьевна Цицер или Андрей Талевлин. Они специализируются именно на ядерной теме. А Сергей давал Талевлина телефон?

Л: Я с ним уже говорил. Мне интересно, как вы это воспринимали.

И: Знаю, что в один момент мы ходили, получается на озеро, господи, как оно... Забыла уже, как называется.

Л: Озёрск?

И: Нет, нет. Получается, что в той стороне в том числе озеро. И дождь прошёл. Мы ходили грибы собирать с подружкой. После этого жутко мучились от головной боли после дождя.

Л: А в Карабаше вы были?

И: Была один раз. Это было как раз, когда я только узнала про Томинский ГОК и в декабре в группе собирался автобус туда съездить.

Л: Чтобы посмотреть, как может выглядеть Томинский ГОК?

И: Да, да. Но нет. Понимаешь, это немножко некорректное сравнение, потому что на данном этапе в проекте нет медеплавильного производства. А в Карабаше в основном медеплавильное. И не нужно забывать о том, что это накопленный экологический ущерб. С 30-х годов завод работал, и это накапливалось. РМК внесло свою лепту, безусловно. Когда они отжали завод рейдерским захватом, Лысая гора, которая там есть, уже зеленела. После того, как РМК пришла работать на Карабашмедь, о каких нормах экологических мы можем говорить? Труд Горькавого Николая случайно не читали?

Л: О чём?

И: Там идёт соприкосновение данных нашего министерства экологии и данных спутников NASA по выбросу диоксида серы. Получается, Николай говорит, что у нас в двухтысячные годы выброс диоксида серы превышал 300 000 тонн. А наше министерство экологии показывало, что там вообще копейки. То есть мало того, что у них был огромный объём производства, они занижали данные о выбросах. Получается, не говорили на самом деле, сколько продукции они выпускают. Это уход от налогов в том числе был. Если интересно почитать, у него есть замечательная статья. РМК начали, там просто страшно смотреть. Диоксид серы, он чувствуется. После запуска их якобы супер-пупер очистного цеха... Люди задыхаются. Сейчас там живут 11 тысяч, было больше 50 тысяч населения. Сейчас кто может, уезжает. Но у людей защитная реакция, когда говорят, что Карабаш — самый грязный город.

Также как и про Челябинск. Это обидно. Если ты не примешь это и не снимешь розовые очки, ты ничего можешь сделать для улучшения своего города. Это нужно принять, понять и двигаться по направлению того, чтоб это исправить.

Л: Здесь тоже коренным жителям обидно, если кто-то говорит, что Челябинск грязный?

И: Да. Многие обижаются.

Л: Расскажите.

И: Это парадокс, но люди обижаются. Это вроде как твой дом. Пусть он большой, но это твой дом. И когда говорят, что в твоём доме грязно, многие люди обижаются. Но это нужно понять и принять. У тебя в доме грязно, значит, нужно сделать генеральную уборку. Правильно? Что нужно для этого сделать? Выбросы предприятий — нужно очистные нормальные сделать, политика, управление городом, мэр и губернатор в последние 5 лет привели в такой упадок Челябинск, что это просто катастрофа какая-то. Если раньше мы смотрели на город и говорили: «Челябинск динамично развивается. Как здорово!». Во-первых, пришёл Юревич и вырубил очень много деревьев. Эта «Дорожная революция»... Он уже область банкротом сделал. Во-вторых, Дубровский когда пришёл — это всё. Он сам промышленник, металлург. Друзья — металлурги. То есть лобби было именно этого клана металлургического. Всё. Стали задыхаться. В этом декабре было очень плохо, я только с респиратором ходила. Как собаки у меня дышали на Теплотехе, я вообще не знаю. А в семнадцатом году в декабре — это просто ужас был. Но вот, оказывается, нам говорят, что не выбросы предприятий виноваты, а то, что у нас ветра нет, погода виновата.

Л: Политики это говорят?

И: Да. «Опять НМУ, опять НМУ». У нас в городе больше половины дней в году НМУ [неблагоприятные метеорологические условия для рассеивания выбросов в воздухе].

Л: Я говорил с журналисткой 74.ру. Она мне сказала, что летом ФСБ проводила обыски у ЧМК и других предприятий. Она сказала, что после того стало лучше с воздухом. Она права?

И: Такие обыски были, да. Но пока не изменится отношение руководящего состава области к выбросам и деятельности комбинатов, мало что изменится. Это может быть показное в большинстве, потому что говорят, но результатов мы не видим никаких. То есть, прежде всего какие результаты должны быть? Наверное, это большие штрафы за нарушение экологического законодательства. Мы этого не видим. Штраф 80 тысяч для огромного завода — это просто копейки. Зато людям у нас за митинги 250 тысяч дают. Нормально! Заинтересованность должна быть. Люди просыпаться начали. Начали интересоваться своим здоровьем. Но мало пока ещё. А то, что они с силовиками... Вы с Марией Широненко разговаривали с 74.ру?

Л: Да. Знаете?

И: Мы не лично знакомы. Но как бы так знаю. В свое время 74.ру было очень неплохое СМИ. И когда наша проблема возникла, они её неплохо освещали. Но потом с Русской медной компании приехал, по моему, Говоров. Заключение договор, купили помещение. И всё. С тех пор, у нас только заказные статьи в большинстве идут через 74.ру.

Л: Я там видел много статей про экологические проблемы, и это хорошо. Но, с другой стороны, они очень плохо пишут про Стоп ГОК.

И: Это изменилось в последнее время после того, как Русская медная компания заключила с ним контракт.

Л: Она мне сказала, что они независимые.

И: Конечно. *(улыбается)*

Л: Но, по-моему, личные взгляды журналистов тоже влияют.

И: Я не знаю Марию лично... У нас в своё время конфликт возник. В прошлом году, получается... Вот Шершни, вот дорога через дамбу, и в той стороне на берегу водохранилища у людей есть сады, которым достаточно много лет. Там очень хорошие дома. И многие люди перебрались из-за выбросов туда. Настроили посёлков.

Л: На восточном берегу?

И: Нет, на западном берегу, получается. Коттеджные посёлки Холмс, Западный, Белые Росы — вот это всё. И возникла проблема, что людям очень плохо добираться. У нас построить построили, а подумать о том, как люди добираться до работы будут... Инфраструктуры нет. Одна дорога через дамбу, через Шершни, и она очень загружена. Люди иногда по два или три часа иногда добираются до работы утром, а потом так же возвращаются вечером с работы. Так вот они решили изначально провести дороги через сады. То есть снести дома, которые люди строили 20, 30, 40 лет, где они живут, и построить дорогу. И у Марии Широной как раз там оказался дом, сад. Она писала статью по этому поводу. До этого она радовалась: «Нас не коснётся влияние Томинского ГОКа! Мы далеко». Коснулось вас, потому что прежде всего это отношение власти к людям. По-другому никак не скажешь.

Л: Можете рассказать, как вы попали в движение Стоп ГОК?

И: Легко. Мы с мужем любим цветы, любим собак, животных. Получается, что в самом чистом направлении, параллельно дороге в Томино у нас есть сад. Сад «Часовщик». Мы подумали, подумали: землю купить. объездили, нашли неплохой участок. Дёшево так получилось, мы купили там землю. Получается, «Часовщик», а там посёлок Синеглазово. 20 минут до города, на машине практически без пробок. У меня к работе близко, мама тут рядом. Я радуюсь, купили землю, хоть небольшой домик, теплицу большую сделать, цветы... А мне говорят: «А что ты радуешься? Там рядом Томинский ГОК собираются строить». Я давай в интернете смотреть, потому что никакой информации толком вообще нигде не было.

Л: Как вы это узнали?

И: На работе сказал человек, который об этом слышал, шофёр. Я давай искать, что же такое Томинский ГОК и нашла группу ВКонтакте «СтопГОК». Вступила, смотрела, смотрела. Потом уже в ноябре вставала в пикеты. Уже людям рассказывала, как что.

Л: Это было в пятнадцатом году?

И: Да, в пятнадцатом году летом мы купили в августе и буквально в сентябре, в конце августа я узнала об этом. То есть первоначально-то борьба началась за клочок своей земли. Потом уже понимаешь, насколько это глобальная угроза, не только моему клочку земли, не только Синеглазово. Но угроза вообще в принципе Челябинской области. Это касается и Копейска, и Октябрьского. Там с обеих сторон много садов. Огромный объём.

Л: Тогда это уже было два года известно официально, правильно?

И: Нет. Подожди. Люди узнали об этом давно. В тринадцатом году уже группа собиралась из нескольких человек. А вообще первые слушания были в двенадцатом. Мы были у Ольги Яковец в Томинском, а есть ещё Томино. А может быть, в Томинском, я уже сейчас путаюсь, собирали. Мы сначала планировали к Наталии Германовне Судаковой съездить. Но не получилось. Она как раз участвовала в слушаниях вместе с гончаром РМК и говорила, что это только благо, это чистая водичка и песочек, это вообще ничего страшного, это замечательный проект, и всё у вас будет просто отлично.

Л: Когда люди начали раскрывать, что это не так?

И: Во-первых, нам повезло в том, что у нас неравнодушные люди оказались из этого сначала небольшого количества. И, во-вторых, специалисты. Юрий Борисович Черкасов сам занимается геологоразведкой. Он знает, как. Он начал раскручивать это. Олег Магазов, то есть еще люди. Потом подключились такие эксперты, как Надежда Ивановна Вертиховская, Светлана Васильевна Князева. Они не ожидали. Русская медная компания не ожидала, что сообщество челябинцев возникнет достаточно дружное, такое движение, которое будет помогать безвозмездно, участвовать во всём. И самым главным фундаментом будет именно знание, не просто какое-то там: «Мне бабушка сказала»... Сорок лет стажа, сорок пять лет стажа... Сергей у нас химик, он тоже это просчитал. Надежда Ивановна рассказывала, что прочитала ОВОС до 15 страницы — это предварительная оценка воздействия на окружающую среду — и поняла, что это афёра, этого не может быть. Это бред. Светлана Васильевна посмотрела, у неё просто волосы встали дыбом. Они этого не ожидали.

Л: Перед тем, как вы попали в движение, вы занимались политикой вообще?

И: На рассуждении кухонном. Кухонная тема, скажем так, была. Мы говорили, конечно, что-то, но не особо. В большинстве столько времени я не уделяла. Это однозначно. Не уделяла столько времени отдельному сбору мусора, например. А это уже настолько серьёзные проблемы на планете, что просто необходимо браться за это очень быстро. А здесь, конечно, горизонты моего сознания расширились.

Л: Я говорил с Борисом Золотаревским. Он мне рассказал, что сначала думал, что надо просто сообщить Путину и всё...

И: Все так думали. Не сопоставляли. Может быть, это не так явно смотрелось, может на это не обращали внимание. Естественно, президент — это гарант конституции, правильно? Изначально мы попытались обратиться к гаранту конституции. В конституции есть статья 42, которая говорит, что каждый человек имеет право на благоприятную окружающую среду. Это у нас прописано. Значит, это должно соблюдаться. Значит, собираем подписи. Уже в пятнадцатом году собирали, стояли в пикетах и в мороз, и в жару. В Москву два раза или три раза ездили.

Л: К Путину?

И: Не к самому, но в администрацию Президента. Естественно, нас к нему никто не пускал. И отписки после этого шли от простых клерков типа какого-то Зыбкина. То огромное количество подписей, которые мы отправляли, оставалось практически без внимания со стороны федерального правительства. Это всё спускалось на уровень региональный. А региональный уровень до сих пор ничего не делает.

Л: Региональное правительство вообще не боится выборов? Они не зависят от голосов?

И: Правительство прекрасно понимает, что, если сейчас будут настоящие выборы, ему просто необходимо будет уйти в отставку, Путину в том числе. Весной 18-го года у нас были выборы. Я знаю очень много людей, которые говорят: «Путин — это наш президент. Не трогайте Путина. Только он — человек, который спасёт Россию». Человеку приводишь факты... Это как фанатики. Но всё равно люди просыпаются. У меня зять такой же был. Только начинали говорить на эту тему. «Не нравится, — говорит, — валите куда хотите». А почему я должна уезжать? Я здесь родилась, я здесь живу. Наверное, нужно каким-то образом менять это всё. Он проснулся летом. На работе, может быть, кто-то помог. Но он начал сопоставлять. Он сейчас тоже говорит, что это просто нереально, что в стране творится. Если бы были настоящие выборы, это было бы нормально. Но мы прекрасно видим, как у нас выборы проходят. Много видео же снято, как вбросы бюллетеней, до смешного доходит. Те же самые учителя, которые просят повысить им зарплату, и они же занимаются этим. Где логика?

Л: Когда люди стали сомневаться, что Путин будет решать проблемы, связанные с Томинским ГОКом?

И: Не могу сказать, что сразу. Все ждали ответа, очень долго ждали, что он реагирует. И потом, митинг с Навальным. Уже не помню в 16-ом или 17-ом году он был...

Л: После того, как он опубликовал ролик «Он вам не Димон»?

И: Может быть. Я не сопоставляю между собой это. Да, в апреле 17-ого года, получается. Мы с Сергеем как раз были организаторами этого митинга. Совершенно случайно нас спрашивал потом Борис Золотаревский, там есть ещё Кирилл: «Ребята, дадите слово Навальному, если он приедет на митинг?» А ты представляешь, это такой шум в нашем Челябинске. Мы тогда все вместе собрались, потому что это всё не единолично решается. Собрались там на этой площадке в «Коллющенко», где нам разрешили. Давайте думать, дадим или не дадим слово. Потому что, если мы дадим, предполагаем, что это будет шумиха. Решили дать слово.

Л: И это было...

И: Страшно это было. Почему страшно? Потому что потом началось прессование. Нас вызвали в прокуратуру.

Л: А перед этим ничего не было?

И: Нет. Они не знали. Это всё держалось в секрете. А когда Навальный уже объявил, что едет в Челябинск на митинг... Это был вообще ужас. *(Смеётся)*. Я до сих пор сейчас вспоминаю. Прокуратура давай давить: «Это неправильно, вы не понимаете, куда вы влезли». Потом в администрацию нас вызвали. Там уже были сотрудники центра по борьбе с экстремизмом. Тоже давай нас прессовать. Но благо с нами был Вахрушев, он юрист. И он очень хорошо снял напряжение, на себя перевёл и с ними спокойно на юридическом языке разговаривал. Ну и когда мы пришли на митинг с Сергеем. Митинг был в час, по-моему. И мы приехали туда в пол двенадцатого. Подходим к этому скверу: а там автозаков, вот так в ряд...

Л: И никогда раньше такого не было?

И: Да что ты! Бог с тобой. Страшно. Там всё серо. Там эти космонавты с щитами везде, там по периметру везде собаки. *(Смеётся)*. Я эту картинку сейчас вспоминаю, как это было. Я просто представила, что, если будет какая-то провокация на митинге, нам мало не покажется. Это будет большая драка. Провокация была. Но очень хорошо вывели сразу людей, подростки какие были там. Но именно после этого митинга в первый раз нам ответили на резолюцию. Мы зачитали резолюцию этого митинга. И в первый раз наши региональные власти на эту резолюцию ответили. И потом «Guardian» написала, пусть вскользь, и больше, конечно, о Навальном. Но тем не менее подняла проблему Томинского ГОКа. В это время мы прорвали местную информационную блокаду. Тогда уже начали интересоваться этой темой федеральные СМИ. Алиса Кустикова начала приезжать. Она вообще умничка. Она такой репортаж замечательный сделала.

Л: Для «Новой газеты»?

И: Да. Вообще она просто молодец. Мы так радовались, что она в этом году победила. Там на конкурсе каком-то первое место заняла. Она просто молодец.

Л: Решение принять Навального на митинг было обсуждено?

И: Да. Мы это обсуждали. Мы не могли принять только на себя это решение. Это касалось всего движения. Естественно, мы не стали полностью движение собирать, то есть большой круг людей. Мы собрали малый, потому что это были люди, которые постоянно участвуют. Есть же люди просто диванные, кто пишет комментарии одни, но при этом не готов ничего делать для этого. Я считаю, что такой человек имеет право на своё мнение, это безусловно. Но в решении какой-то проблемы я бы не могла учитывать его мнение. Потому что он ничего не делает. Он не отвечает ни за что. Поэтому мы собрались. Нас было, наверное, человек двенадцать-пятнадцать — актив такой. Мы поговорили. Одна только у нас была против. Но она была не против Навального, а потому что страшно было. Она тоже понимала, чем это может кончиться.

Л: Только одна была против?



И: Да. И то она так слабо была против, потому что... ну страшно. Знала, чем это может обернуться, так скажем.

Л: На вас лично тоже оказывалось государством какое-нибудь давление? Вы получили какие-то штрафы?

И: Лично я? Да. На меня тоже завели. Скажем так, они до сих пор это тянут. У нас собрание было в прошлом году, в январе. Волей судеб получилось так, что у меня родственники живут в Варне. От Варны недалеко Михеевский ГОК. После ввода ГОКа в эксплуатацию у меня у родственников возникли проблемы со здоровьем, периодически высыпания на коже, и такие язвочки незаживающие. Поговорили, связывается это именно с выбросами от Михеевского ГОКа. Даже Росстат подтвердил, что выбросы выросли — не помню во сколько раз, но они выросли очень сильно. Там же открытый способ разработки. И если сульфидная пыль попадает на кожу... Потная рука, например, или сгиб, где влага есть, то образуется слабый раствор серной кислоты. И, скорее всего, именно из-за этого возникли их проблемы. Но это мои предположения. Об этом я говорила на собрании, что даже в 30 километров отсюда ощущается воздействие, не говоря о жителях Котенино близлежащего, там четыре километра. Они страдают однозначно. После этого директор Михеевского ГОКа подал на меня заявление центральному МВД за клевету.

Л: За то, что вы сказали?

И: Да. За клевету. Меня вызывали в центральное МВД. Я ходила туда летом восемнадцатого года. Но я сказала: «51-ая статья конституции, я совершенно не могу ни против себя, ни против своих родственников ничего говорить», на что они очень сильно расстроились. Ну, пока об этом ничего не говорится. Он подал как юридическое лицо, я — физлицо. Юридически это диссонирует просто. Будем ждать, что дальше будет.

Л: После этого ничего не слышали?

И: Осенью Белогорохова и Московца вызывали и ещё нескольких людей, кто был на собрании. И спрашивали, опрашивали против меня, есть ли там что-то или нет, как это было. А так, конечно, девятого ноября, когда президент позвонил Московцу, у нас всех забирали поголовно. Я тоже была на пикете с Ириной Гладышевой и Юлией Тихоновой. В машине грелись. И нас эшники просто прижали машиной. Зажали, чтобы мы никуда не смогли уехать.

Л: Это было после...

И: Это было до звонка, вечером этого дня. Мы в одиночном пикете стояли по всему городу.

Л: Мне тоже рассказали, что вы устраивали ежедневные пикеты перед Городской думой. Когда это было?

И: Постоянно. И городская дума, и правительство Челябинской области, и законодательное собрание, и прокуратура. Были периоды, когда мы каждый день выходили, например, около прокуратуры мы каждый день стояли. Час кто-то стоял, следующий час, например, я с работы освобождалась, приходила, брала у него плакат, вставала я час. Потом меня сменяли. Это было периодически у разных учреждений, которые могли бы и могут влиять на судьбу Челябинска. Мы там устраивали пикеты. Экологическая вахта у нас вообще долго была. В 15-ом году она уже была.

Л: Вы сказали, что они иногда штрафовали людей за то, что передавали плакаты от руки до руки, потому что тогда это уже не одиночный пикет.

И: Нет, этого не было. У нас был такой инцидент, что подставили Веру Борисовну Василёвскую. Она стояла как раз около прокуратуры с плакатом. Видит, идёт молодой человек. Встаёт рядом с ней и разворачивает плакат. Это получается уже не одиночный пикет. Провокатор был с Коркино. Она ему говорит, ругается: «Убери плакат, уйди отсюда». И тут же, по мановению волшебной палочки, приходят сотрудники центра «Э». И милиция тут же, и всех вяжут, естественно. И тогда Вере Борисовне предъявили, что она уже как организатор массового пикета, что это нарушение. Но мы отстояли суд. Никакого штрафа, оправдали.

Л: Как вы пережили задержание Асатуллина? Как вы это восприняли?

И: Гамиля?

Л: Да.

И: Тяжело. Это были выходные, в июне. Ты слышал, что сегодня Московцу предъявили обвинение: финансовый ущерб 124 миллиона. Получается, что Гамиль активный был среди нас всех, десятого, одиннадцатого, двенадцатого, мы все были на полях. Каждый день мы были с мужем там. Видели прекрасно, как и что там. И как палатку рвали у нас на глазах. Они идут с такими глазами, мы думали, что убьют, что сейчас всё. Тяжело, потому что мы все вместе были. И, конечно, очень обидно было, что подставил Гамиля так Медведев. Очень сильно переживали все.

Л: Вы злились на него?

И: Нет. Я не злилась. Мне было обидно, что он не подумал. Это нельзя было делать, потому что в нашей стране такое не прокатывает. Русская медная компания — это большой холдинг. И просто так не остановить её. Во-первых, ошибка такого человека могла привести к тому, что скажут: «Ребята, так у вас Стоп ГОК — вообще экстремистское движение. Вы вон чем занимаетесь». Это ведь тоже сторона одной медали. Может быть, если бы у нас собрались человек 300 мужиков на этом поле, может быть, по-другому решилось. Но это мы можем только предполагать. Тогда у нас было не так много человек. Люди боятся, потому что проходили слушания. Видели, как молодчики действуют. Там на поле люди видели: приезжают малолетки в спортивных штанах, извините, спортивного телосложения, просто безбашенные. Люди просто боялись. Если бы Гамиль поговорил с кем-то о том, что он собирается, его бы отговорили — сто процентов. Обидно, конечно, человек отсидел столько времени.

Л: 9 месяцев?

И: Да, долго.

Л: Вы тоже его поддерживали на суде?

И: К сожалению, я работала. Я по возможности только посты делала да на карту денежку можно было перевести, потому что жена осталась одна. И ему надо было какие-то передачи. Люди сбрасывались, передачи ему возили туда. А так, да, много из наших ходили на суды, у кого работа позволяет отпроситься, или кто не работает.

Л: Как здесь можно убеждать людей? Как вы это пережили, когда вы с знакомыми говорили про ГОК? Что они в большинстве говорят?

И: Проблема Томинского ГОКа стала для нас лакмусовой бумажкой. Чтобы понять, кто с тобой рядом. Получается, что мы с одной подругой разошлись. Она мне конкретно говорит: «Ну что я могу сделать?» Я говорю: «В пикет выйти, поддержать, газеты раздать». Она так смотрит и говорит: «Я лучше ребёнку рубашку поглажу в школу, но я не буду в этом участвовать. Что я могу делать? Зачем мне это надо? Время своё лично тратить на это?» Мы разошлись. Это не моя подруга, потому что я не могу так жить.

Л: Я иногда общался с челябинцами, которые не являются активистами. Почти все знают, что такое ГОК и что это очень опасно.

И: Мы пытались это донести. Мы очень большую работу провели по этому поводу. Я согласна, что не все знают, но многие знают, что на самом деле опасно.

Л: У молодых людей, у людей, у которых есть какое-то образование, они вообще все в курсе, настолько я это могу оценивать.

И: Большинство тех, кто пользуется интернетом. Это большинство.

Л: Но у людей нет веры, что можно что-то изменить.

И: Да.

Л: Это главная проблема?

И: Это главная проблема. Люди не верят, что это можно остановить. Они привыкли, что у нас беззаконие, что у нас в большинстве никто не отвечает ни за что. Ролик видели, когда Гуман говорила, что у нас Шершни перетекут в карьер? То есть этот экологический аудит, который заказывали в Свердловске. Ректор вуза говорила при чиновниках, и они слышали прекрасно, что может произойти. «Как вы можете переживать, что у вас Шершни загрязнятся? Они перетекут в карьер». Никто же из них вопрос не задал: «Как это так? Какое воздействие у нас будет Шершни на самом деле, если вы такое говорите?». Да, это очень сложно, именно вот это в голове. Наверное, прежде всего начинается с сознания, что я не раб. Я могу что-то сделать. Я могу разделить мусор. Я могу прийти на митинг. Я могу раздать газеты. И не бояться этого сделать. Многие люди боятся этого сделать. Они не хотят в этом участвовать. Сергей почему не может на работу устроиться? Потому что в большинстве служба безопасности предприятий проверяет. И там находят в интернете: участник движения Стоп ГОК активный. Поэтому говорят: «Извините». С Олесей Ефимовой и Вадимом Булатовым тоже так было. РМК звонила своим приближённым: «У вас работают такие же». Начальство их вызывало и говорило: «Ребята, ничего личного, но...»

Л: У кого это было?

И: Олесея Ефимова и Вадим Булатов, но Вадим уже уехал. Он не справился с этим, продал дом и уехал. Всё. Не верят люди, что можно решить, не верят.

Л: И откуда у вас такая вера, что можно что-то изменить?

И: Честно? Интуиция. Я знаю, что мы это остановим. Сложна руки мы не будем сидеть. Лягушка тоже масло взболтала. Так и мы будем бороться до конца, настолько это возможно. Конечно, очень горько сознавать, что Челябинскую область в помойку превращают, реально в помойку. И мы не виноваты, как сказала на заседании общественной палаты женщина из РМК: «Ребята, вы на Урале родились. Здесь столько полезных ископаемых. Вы сами виноваты, что вы здесь живёте». Я потом подошла к ней и сказала: «Я почему-то думала, что у нас самая главная ценность — это люди. И нужно как-то ориентироваться на то, чтобы людям лучше жилось». Человек посмотрел на меня и не понял.

Л: Я искал информацию про движение «Анти-смог», где работает Олеся Ефимова. На их сайте был номер телефона, который не работает, и адрес электронной почты, который не работает...

И: Ну, как Сергей тебе говорил, это такое правительственное движение. Они везде пиарятся, говорят, что мы такие хорошие, руки жмёт Дубровскому, а на самом деле это просто отвод протеста в сторону.

Л: Но Олеся Ефимова, которая это организует, она тоже поддерживает Стоп ГОК или когда-то поддерживала?

И: Она была в Стоп ГОКе, да. Мы с ней познакомились именно там. Она тогда говорила: «Я верю только нашим экспертам, и ничего более». Здесь возможно, что влияющий фактор — это финансовая сторона. Человек просто сломался, например, под тяжестью суммы, которую ей предложили. Я с ней не разговаривала после этого. Но судить это тяжело. У каждого свои жизненные приоритеты...

Л: Конечно. Не хочу судить, только понимать.

И: Не знаю. Возможно, ей просто стало очень тяжело семью содержать. Она не работала. Может быть, ей захотелось быть в рядах чиновников, например. Такой лёгкий пиар, быть, грубо говоря, у кормушки. Я бы так сказала. Но я не знаю. После этого я с ней не общалась. Очень жаль, конечно, что так произошло.

Л: У вас теперь нет взаимоотношений?

И: Нет. И вряд ли снова будут отношения. Первоначально она сделала огромный вклад. Я с этим не спору. Она была организатором пикетов. У неё там тетрабочка была, в которую мы вносили все данные, кто, чего, перезванивались, когда встаём. Она сделала много. Именно как раз для того, чтобы максимально в городе люди узнали об этой проблеме.

Л: Ваше общие политические взгляды изменились в течение активизма?

И: Конечно, изменились.

Л: В каком направлении?

И: В направлении, что нужно менять. Правительство должно уйти в отставку. Давно пора. Депутаты в Госдуме принимают антинародные законы. Вот почему и люди начали просыпаться, начали смотреть, что, зачем и почему, начали сопоставлять. Одна пенсионная реформа чего стоит. Это что ж такое-то? У нас в Челябинске мужики не доживают до 65 лет. Я думаю, что, если сейчас говорить с людьми, в арифметической прогрессии растёт такой протест, люди всё больше и больше понимают. Говорят, что им не нужно такое. Правительство должно работать для народа. Если оно этого не делает, значит оно должно уйти в отставку. Если президент не справляется со своими возможностями... Он же управляющий, как менеджер, он смотрит за всеми, координирует. Он же не просто рабочий, который выполняет какую-то работу. Необязательно ему самому делать всё. Нужно контролировать. Если ты не справляешься с этим, значит, нужно уходить в отставку.

Л: Вы сказали, что много людей, которые участвуют в движении «Стоп ГОК» и участвуют в группе «Челябинск, дыши!».

И: Да.

Л: Вы сами тоже участвуете?

И: Группа Стоп ГОКа — самая большая. В группе порядка 30 000 человек. Но это 30 000 тысяч в интернет-группе. Тех, кто постоянно участвует, побольше или поменьше, достаточно мало. Мы уже всех в лицо знаем. Вот они приходят на митинг, я со сцены, как организатор, я уже вижу знакомые все лица. И там же они, те же самые люди. Те люди, кто не равнодушен, они и в той группе, и в этой группе. По сути говоря, одна большая группа неравнодушных челябинцев, которые хотят улучшить жизнь свою и своих детей.

Л: А в рядах «Челябинск, дыши!» вы что-нибудь конкретное делаете?

И: У них был митинг весной в том году. Тоже ходили, газеты раздавали. По мере возможностей, конечно.

Л: У меня больше нет вопросов. Вы хотите что-то добавить?

И: Как узнали-то про нас?

Л: Совершенно случайно. Просто читал сайт «ОВД инфо». Там я встретил статью про Московца. Мне это показалось интересным, потому что в Санкт-Петербурге редко узнаёшь о чем-нибудь происходящем вне Москвы и Питера. Тогда я начал искать другие статьи. И меня всё это просто очень возмущало. Я даже не знал, что Челябинск — такой большой город. Я открыл карту на google maps, чтобы понимать, как всё это выглядит. И это было просто очень удивительно — в отрицательном смысле, конечно.

И: Понятно.

Л: Мне кажется, что в либеральном мире в России прежде всего пишут про репрессии какие-то. Но кроме этой темы, есть ещё другие проблемы...

И: Там много, конечно. Я сама посмотрела, когда была весной на митинге, как задерживали людей, когда Навальный устраивал шествие, и осенью. Весной я тогда в первый раз пошла. До этого, 26 марта, я в них не участвовала.

И: В митингах Навального?

Л: Не участвовала в шествиях. А тут мы с мужем пошли, посмотрели. Я посмотрела, что совершенно нормальные люди. Причём в большинстве молодые люди. Никто не был пьяный, никто не был с сигаретой, никто не был с бутылкой пива. Осознанные чистые лица. Совершенно спокойные. Они знают, что хотят изменить свою жизнь. Им только это нужно. Им не нужно каких-то драк, не нужно майданов. Нужно нормально жить в хорошем экологическом месте, насколько это возможно. Потому что всё равно это возможно сделать. Так, чтобы дети были здоровыми, так, чтобы было разнообразие, куда сходить отдохнуть вечером, а не просто, извините, денег нет, ты можешь только дома кино посмотреть. Это необходимо, чтобы человек развивался. Чтобы он мог съездить, например, куда-то в другое место, посмотреть, как люди живут, на Ниагарский водопад... А у нас нет у людей такого количества денег, чтобы съездить куда-то. Нас сажали в такие рамки, закредитовали, зажали всеми тарифами. Большинство просто думает о том, каким образом заплатить, каким образом накормить, как выжить — всё. На этом заикливаются очень много людей. Я хочу, чтобы было по-другому. Я думаю, что это возможно. Ни в коем случае не какой-то кровавой революцией. Это выход в никуда. Это нужно всё на законном уровне делать. Этого нужно добиваться, собирать сообщество. Собралось же у нас движение «Стоп ГОК», сначала против одной проблемы, но прекрасно понимаешь, что одна проблема тянет за собой и другую. Томинский ГОК есть вроде как, строят его, но воздействия от него ещё никто не видел. Это только предполагается, что это будет. Мы это раскрываем. А выбросы у нас почти каждый день. Людей волнуют выбросы. Но в приоритете у меня, естественно, проблема ГОКа, потому что при его постройке про выбросы можно забыть. Города просто не будет. Будет Детройт. Люди просто уедут. Воды не будет. Я считаю, что это, конечно, первичное.

Л: Кстати, вчера я был на восточном берегу водохранилища (Я имел в виду: на западном берегу). Там, где такие странные новостройки. Они тоже воздействуют на качество воды?

И: Очень сильно воздействует. Они настроили, не знаю...

Л: Там целое безобразие там.

И: Это просто катастрофа. У большинства нет канализации. У них вообще непонятно, как что. По-хорошему, это нужно всё сносить и закрывать. Это санитарная зона Шершней. Единственный питьевой источник. И там полнейшее безобразие творится. Об этом говорили, закрывают глаза на это. Кто-то подписывает, и каким-то образом принимают это всё.

Л: Они до сих пор там строят. Много рекламы участков.

И: Да. В своё время отстояли бор наш. Но опять начали говорить о том, что через бор собираются строить дорогу мимо Шершней. Но это невозможно. Санитарная зона должна быть как минимум... У нас это сто метров, по-моему. А по-хорошему, должен быть километр. Я могу ошибаться, Серёжа помнит это точно.

Л: Там так грустно и грязно везде. Я бы не хотел там жить, а предпочёл в нормальной панельке.

И: (*Смеётся*). Смотришь на панельные дома — меня вообще они не радуют. Посмотришь на северо-запад — это как муравейники для рабов. У нас очень много земли. Вообще в России достаточно много свободных земель. И в Челябинске в том числе очень хорошо может развиваться именно индивидуальное строительство. Сосновский район — чистейшее направление в стороне Томинского ГОКа. Там очень много земель, которые можно использовать для строительства домов и плюс подсобные хозяйства какие-то. Можно использовать очень много для фермерских хозяйств. У нас

нехватка молока и молочных продуктов, у нас нет овощей, очень мало овощей. Зачем мы будем покупать в Тюмени или в Шадринске, например, если у нас была бы своя ферма, которая обеспечивает наше снабжение? Вот, пожалуйста, чистое, хорошее молоко. Нет, мы лучше выроем две ямы и непонятно что потом у нас будет. У них в приоритете: достать и продать. А то, что будет дальше, их не волнует. Коркинский разрез не видел, да? Если захочется, можно организовать. Сергей пока не на работе.

Л: Я скоро уже буду уезжать.

И: Жалко, что снега нет. Всё грязное такое, ужас. У нас раньше никогда такого не было. Снег убирался, улицы чистились. Столько зелени было... На соседней улице у меня жила тётя, и я на другой стороне улицы грибы собирала, шампиньоны, и ели. Сквер был у оперного театра стерильный. Вся эта улица была в зелени, а сейчас... Оставили какие-то обрубки американских клёнов и всё.

Л: Стало хуже при Юревиче?

И: Юревич всё вырубил. Нам нужно делать максимальное количество насаждений, особенно тополей для того, чтобы чистили воздух. Дышать-то нечем. В мае мы переезжаем в сад, в октябре возвращаемся. Там даже если ты в час ночи ляжешь спать, утром встаёшь без синяков под глазами. Здесь кожа меняется, вода ужасная стала, умываешься, у тебя всё стягивает. Там вода хорошая, всё нормально. Здесь за Шершни нужно браться, очищать, а они строят какие-то конгресс-холлы непонятные к ШОССу, БРИКСу. Зачем это нужно? Это никому не нужно из челябинцев. Нужно вкладывать в то, что сейчас у нас требует максимального внимания. На первом месте — Шершни. Сделать независимую оценку Шершней, в каком состоянии вода, как это воздействует, и дальше. Я уж не говорю про Томинский ГОК, вы мне покажите исследования, как он будет воздействовать на Шершни, на единственный питьевой источник. Нет же ничего. Они не знают. И дальше что-то делают.