**Protests against the Demolition and Replacement of Housing in Moscow:**

**The Defense of Property Rights**

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**Introduction**

From time to time, protests in Russia have attracted attention in the West. And indeed, the number of protests in that country probably has grown since the early years of this century (Evans 2016a, 110). But it may not be widely recognized that most protests in Russia during the last several years have not explicitly called for the transformation of that country’s political regime. Instead, most protests in Russia have been more narrowly focused and have had a more pragmatic character, as they have arisen in response to actions by government authorities or businesses that have had a significant impact on the daily lives of citizens (Ibid., 112). Such protest movements focus primarily on concrete, specific problems rather than on abstract principles of democracy and human rights (Evans 2018, 4). The targets of complaints by the protesting citizens usually are local officials, and those citizens often appeal to the highest level of authority in the central government to intervene and solve their problems. Also, the demands of the Russians who participate in such protests call for changes in specific policies rather than change in the fundamental character of their country’s political regime. As Petr Skorobogatyi (2017) puts it, “separate groups of civil society are appearing, which unite in order to obtain concretely formulated demands from the authorities.” It is likely that protests in Russia that are directly focused on economic and social issues have become more frequent; Denis Volkov of the Levada Center observes (Mukhametshina 2017a), “in recent years there has been a trend of an increase of citizens’ activism on concrete grounds (*povody*).” It seems certain that no other issue of that sort in Russia since 2005 has mobilized as many people into active participation or stimulated as much controversy in the media as the current question of renovation of housing in Moscow.

**The Plan for Resettlement in Moscow Generated Controversy**

Since February 2017 there has been a heated debate about the demolition of Khrushchev-era apartments in Moscow. The debate erupted when Sergei Sobianin, the Mayor of Moscow, announced a plan to demolish and replace hundreds of thousands of apartments in that city. Most of those apartments had been built in a massive campaign that Soviet Communist leader Nikita Khrushchev had launched in 1957 in response to the severe shortage of housing that had built up during the preceding decades. Those apartments received the informal label of *khrushchevki* in honor of the leader who ordered their construction. (They were also called *piatietazhk*i, since most of them were in five-story buildings.) Though Khrushchev’s housing campaign made it possible for many Soviet families to live in their own separate apartments for the first time, the quality of the construction of the new apartment buildings was low, and the space inside each of those new apartments was small. By 2017 some of those buildings in Moscow had been replaced in a program that had been initiated by the previous mayor, Iurii Luzhkov (Voronov 2017b), but the majority of those old buildings were still standing, and it was reported that many of them had deteriorated badly.

It is difficult to say when Sobianin decided to replace all of the remaining khrushchevki (and some other buildings) in Moscow. Some officials in the office of the mayor have said that active discussion of that idea had begun in the city government before the end of 2016 (Liauv and Gruzinova 2017). However, some sources have revealed that the planning for a large-scale program of resettlement had been taking place since 2014 (Golunov 2017), with the concrete outline for that program being presented to Sobianin in August or September of 2016. At any rate, the decision in favor of that plan must have been made before February of 2017, when efforts were made to create the impression that there was extensive popular demand for such a program (Tiukova 2017; Voronov 2017a; Sidorov 2017). On February 21 Sobianin met with Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, and they engaged in a conversation that was widely publicized. On that occasion Sobianin argued that repairing the old apartments that were in bad condition would not be feasible, and that the only workable solution would be to demolish all of them. Putin affirmed that the people of Moscow hoped for the destruction of the old apartment buildings, and he agreed that the “most correct decision” was in favor of the program of “renovation” (which also is often called the program of *snos*, or demolition), as conceived by the mayor (Voronov 2017b). Putin also added words of caution, however, insisting that the resettlement of those who were living in the old apartments should be carried out so that “all would suit the people.” The program that was envisioned was to be on a huge scale, as it was expected to entail the destruction of 7,934 apartment buildings with a floor space of 25,100,000 square meters (consisting of about one tenth of the housing space of Moscow) and the resettlement of 1,600, 000 people, at an estimated cost of three and a half trillion rubles (Bekbulatova, Voronov, and Ivanov 2017).

To facilitate the vast “renovation” project, the government of Moscow drafted a proposed law, which was introduced in the Duma, the lower house of the national parliament, on March 10, 2017 (Voronov 2017c). That draft law immediately provoked an intense controversy. If that law had been adopted, it would have permitted the city government to demand that the residents of an apartment agree to give up ownership of their residence within sixty days. If those residents did not sign that contract within that time, a court could order the discontinuation of their right of ownership of their apartment, and any objections that the residents presented to a court would be limited to complaints about the floor space in their new apartment—not about the location of the new building, the quality of construction, the market value of the new apartment, or any other issues (Liauv 2017a). The proposed law would also have allowed the construction of new housing by the city of Moscow to be exempt from a number of regulations in federal laws, including those related to sanitation and protection against fires (Voronov 2017d). Evidently the government of Moscow hoped that both houses of the national legislature would approve the bill quickly before a controversy could arise. But it soon became obvious that the city government’s hope had been utterly unrealistic.

Among the people who immediately attacked the proposed legislation were “virtual activists” who communicated their criticism though blogs and social media, disseminating frightening stories about possible scenarios that supposedly awaited Muscovites who lived in old apartments (Sokolova and Mikhailova 2017). Very often the residents in an old apartment like the location of their building, with convenient access to children’s playgrounds, day care facilities, medical clinics, schools, shops, and parks (Shuvalova 2017; Butuzova 2017a). Being within walking distance of a metro station is particularly important for residents of Moscow, and that advantage is much more common in older neighborhoods than in newer developments. When those who live in the khrushchevki look out their windows they are used to seeing nearby buildings that are not very tall and are surrounded by mature trees. Some commentators predicted that most of the buildings that would be provided to house people who had lived in the khrushchevki would be from seventeen to twenty-five stories high, which would greatly increase the density of the population in the neighborhoods in which those buildings would be located (Stepovoi 2017). Some sources estimated that the construction of a large number of such higher apartment buildings would result in the addition of three or four million more residents in Moscow (Voronov 2-01f). Grigorii Rezin estimated that the density of the population in the parts of the city in which new buildings were located would be three and a half times as great as that in the districts in which old apartment buildings are located, and that as a result Moscow could have “only Asian bedroom districts on the model of Chinese megapolises” (Mishina and Tiazhlov 2017).

Most crucially, many Muscovites saw the proposed law as an assault on the ownership of private property. The fundamental objection to the proposed law on demolition and resettlement was that it would take away the property in housing that had been granted to citizens of Russia in 1991 (*Novye izvestiia* 2017a). Thirty-two deputies of the elected councils of various districts of Moscow sent a letter to the speaker of the Duma, which alleged that the proposed law would violate the rights of the owners of housing, and therefore be contrary to articles of the Constitution of Russia (Voronov 2017d). One commentator charged that the draft legislation was “in essence, an action of the abolition of the property of citizens” (Khachaturov 2017). Another report asserted that the residents of khrushchevki in Moscow were ready to defend desperately “the main capitalist achievement, the right of property in an apartment,” because “many of them have nothing else” (“u mnogikh bol’she nichego net”) (Zheleznova 2017). Aleksei Belianin saw the thinking of residents whose fears were aroused by the proposed resettlement as reflecting the concept in economic psychology of “the effect of possession” (*Kommersant* 2017a). Igor’ Zotov related that in meetings with district executives and in social media, “people speak of their constitutional rights, in first place, of the right to private property” (Zotov 2017b).

In buildings and neighborhoods across Moscow, hundreds of groups protested against the resettlement project. Newly formed “committees for the defense of khrushchevki” were formed in various districts (*raiony*) in Moscow, and other groups also arose at the district level (Gruzinova, Liauv, and Vinogradova 2017). There were reports that activists were creating groups in social media, holding meetings, and agitating to encourage their neighbors to vote against the demolition of their homes (*BBC, Russkaia sluzhba* 2017). One group that was communicating through Facebook was called “Moskvichi protiv snosa” (Muscovites against demolition) (Boiarskii 2017), and it was disclosed on April 9 that 6,300 people had joined that group (*Novye izvestiia* 2017b). By that same date nearly 27,000 people had signed a petition demanding that the Duma refuse to adopt the proposed law (Ibid.). The intensity of the reaction to the draft law was suggested when sources spoke of the “hysteria” that it had provoked among some residents in Moscow (Ibid.; Gruzinova, Liauv, and Vinogradova 2017) or the great “incandescence” of passion that it had set off (Mishina 2017a). Aleksei Raskhodchikov of the Moscow Center of Urbanistics commented that the program of renovation had encountered “unprecedented resistance” (Mishina 2017b). Nataliia Ose (2017) said that the mechanisms written into the first draft of the law on renovation had provoked “a reaction like the descent of an avalanche.”

In April the executive heads of districts (*raiony*) in Moscow held hearings on the plan for resettlement, and in some cases the rooms where the hearings were held were crowded beyond capacity with concerned residents (Voronov 2017e). Around seven hundred people showed up for one of those meetings, which went on until midnight (Mukhametshina and Churakova 2017). It appeared that the hearings usually did not soothe the most apprehensive apartment dwellers, since those executives generally were unable to answer the most sensitive questions that were posed (Zotov 2017a; Vinokurova 2017a; Zotov 2017b). According to one article in *Vedomosti*, the authorities in that city “had underestimated Muscovites’ interest in the theme of renovation and the level of their dissatisfaction, which was bordering on panic” (Zheleznova 2017). A source quoted by *Kommersant* said that the numbers of those who attended many of the encounters with district executives were “unprecedented,” and “possibly the largest in the recent history of Moscow” (Mishina and Tiazhlov 2017). In May, the rooms for meetings with the prefects (chief executives) of the *okrugy* of Moscow were overflowing with citizens (*Newsmsk.com* 2017d).

Among the leaders of groups that opposed the resettlement project were some of the elected deputies of district councils. The deputies who were activists in the movement opposing the renovation plan included Iuliia Galiamina (*Newsmsk.com* 2017a), Elena Rusakova (Ibid.), Aleksandra Andreeva (Eismont 2017), and Konstantin Iankauskas (Mukhametshina 2017a). Each of those deputies had already developed ties with local residents while campaigning for office and serving in a district council, and had gained experience in struggles over issues related to construction (Eismont 2017). Also, some people emerged as leaders of mobilization of their fellow citizens for the first time, including Kerri Guggenberger (Mukhametshina 2017a), who became one of the most prominent organizers of the protests against resettlement.

The draft law on resettlement stimulated the growth of grass-roots level activism, starting on a very small scale, but with widening interaction. According to Igor’ Zotov, the authorities of Moscow, by introducing that proposal, “compelled people to become acquainted with their neighbors, to prepare together appeals, to unite in initiative groups, and coordinate with similar activists in other districts” (Zotov 2017b). Apparently, horizontal ties were developed (Ibid.) both through face-to-face interaction in meetings of dwellers in apartment buildings and encounters with district officials, and through channels of communication in the internet, as mentioned earlier. In the words of Maksim Builov, groups of activists were formed in “almost every courtyard (*dvor*) of every apartment building,” conducting assemblies and collecting signatures on petitions for or against the law on renovation (Builov 2017). As his narrative suggested, the residents of an apartment building often were split on the prospect of moving. Natal’ia Zubarevich sees the emergence of such activism as reflecting a “higher capability of local self-organization when the issue pertains to vitally important interests” (Zubarevich 2017).

The leaders of the activists in the various parts of the city organized a protest against the proposed resettlement, which was held near the center of Moscow on May 14, 2017. Over 20,000 people took part in that demonstration (Chernykh and Tiazhlov 2017; Korzhova and Overchenko 2017; Sardzhveladze, Annenskaia, and Fedorov 2017). The organizers prohibited displays of the banners and other symbols of political parties in that protest (Chernykh and Tiazhlov 2017). The central theme of the protest was the defense of private property, as reflected in poster proclaiming, “I am an owner, not a tenant,” and the complaint that the plan for renovation “deprives a person of the right of property.” It was clear that for most of those who took part in that rally, their goal was narrowly focused on one piece of legislation and did not include an explicit demand for change in their country’s political regime. Another theme of the protesters was that of defense of the laws and constitution of Russia (Mukhametshina 2017b). They alleged that the proposed law on demolition and resettlement would violate the constitution and a number of federal laws (Petrov and Butuzova 2017), and that charge was reflected by a poster that pleaded, “Do not demolish my Constitution!” One of the organizers of the protest, Iuliia Galiamina, claimed that those who were protesting were actually defending the Russian state, since the plan for renovation was, in her view, an anti-constitutional program (Korzhova and Overchenko 2017).

While there was little or no criticism of President Putin at that protest, speakers at the demonstration did call for Sergei Sobianin to be removed from the office of mayor of Moscow (Petrov and Butuzova 2017; Balmforth 2017). The participants in the meeting adopted a resolution “against the demolition of Moscow, and in defense of the right of private property” (Korzhova 2017). In response to that demonstration, Sobianin offered a conciliatory statement, pledging that he would “attentively consider the positions of the residents of the capital” who took part in the protest (Polozov 2017). He may have been aware that many of those who participated in that event hoped that the legislative proposal to which they objected would be withdrawn as a result of a dialogue with the authorities (Mukhametshina 2017b). The next major demonstration against the project of resettlement, in late May, was smaller, with fewer than five thousand people taking part (*Newsmk* 2017f), and with demands for Sobianin to leave office being voiced more frequently (Karelin and Rabadanova 2017). During the months that followed, those who protested against the resettlement program often supported the goal of firing Sobianin (*Newsmsk.com* 2017k).

We should recognize that many of those who were living in the apartments that were slated for demolition were probably happy about the prospect of receiving new housing, since the buildings in which they were living were in poor condition. Some experts estimated that from twenty to thirty percent of the residents of the old apartments were opposed to losing their homes (Mishina and Tiazhlov 2017; Galimova and Dergachev 2017). It was clear that there was a division in opinion among the residents in old apartment buildings in Moscow on the question of renovation (Ibid.). But we should also be aware that from 20 to 30 percent of the people living in the old apartments that were initially listed as targets for demolition would consist of at least 320,000 people and as many as 480,000, providing a large base for potential protests. In May a number of municipal deputies and leaders of initiative groups announced that they had created The Committee for Rescuing Moscow (*Komitet spaseniia Moskvy*) (Sergeeva 2017b), with representatives from forty-four districts of Moscow. That committee adopted the goals of resisting the urban development policy of the government of Moscow and protecting the rights of people whose apartments had been selected for demolition.

There was an extraordinary amount of public criticism of the draft law from a variety of sources at the elite level. In early April Galina Khovanskaia, the chair of the Committee on Housing and Communal Services in the Duma, insisted that it would be necessary to remove defects from that draft, and frankly added that “it needed serious and radical finishing (*dorabotka*)” (Churakova 2017a). Khovanskaia later said flatly that the proposed law contradicted the Constitution of Russia (Voronov 2017e). Dmitrii Azarov, who headed a committee in the Federation Council, the upper house of the national legislature, complained that the document did not acknowledge the necessity of taking into account citizens’ opinion about resettlement (Voronov and Bekbulatova 2017). By the middle of April, *Vedomosti* reported that the government considered that additional study of the very conception of renovation was needed (Churakova 2017b). Soon after that happened, The President’s Council on the Codification and Improvement of Civil Legislation weighed in, charging that the plan was “based on a lack of respect for the right of private property” (Liauv and Kornia 2017).

The analysis of the draft law by the Duma’s Legal Administration was also highly critical; a newspaper article summarized its conclusion as, “the content of the draft has a non-rightful, non-constitutional, and non-legal character” (Doroshenko 2017). Later in April there was a report that, while the government (“the White House”) in principle supported the idea of renovation of housing in Moscow, it considered that the draft contained a number of gaps, which demanded additional study and work (Luk’ianova, Khamraev, and Ivanov 2017). In May the Procurator of Moscow joined in the criticism, observing that the proposed law on renovation might demand “significant correction” (*Kommersant* 2017c). Soon after that happened, Tat’ana Moskal’kova, the Ombudsman of Russia, advocated the defense of the interests of the residents in old apartments, as she urged the members of the Duma to present the owners of apartments that were to be demolished with a choice between several options (Voronov 2017h). In late May she said that she considered it premature for residents to be asked to choose whether their apartments would be included in the project of renovation (as voting on that question in apartment buildings had begun on May 15), before the federal law on that subject had been passed and the conditions of the program had become clear (*Kommersant* 2017d). In June, as the Duma moved toward approval of the law on renovation, the Presidium of the President’s Council on Human Rights proposed that the adoption of that law be postponed by the Duma for at least six months (Voronov 2017j), to allow further consideration of its implications for the right of ownership of property. Most importantly, it became evident that the controversy over the proposed resettlement troubled Vladimir Putin, because he announced on April 26 that he would not sign a law on renovation “if it would violate the rights of citizens” (Voronov 2017g). He directed the government “to work through (*prorabotat’*) that theme thoroughly and in dialogue with the public.” That remarkable statement signaled that Sobianin’s plan was in trouble and that Putin was distancing himself from the government of the capital.

Nevertheless, some officials in Moscow showed a negative attitude toward critics of the program of renovation, and they even questioned the wisdom of allowing democratic choices at the grass roots level. Anastasia Rakova, a deputy mayor, urged the chief executives of districts in Moscow not to conduct meetings of the owners of housing, since she considered an assembly of owners in an apartment building to be “a revolutionary form” (Vinokurova 2017b4). She also alleged that the “scandal” about the renovation project had been “fabricated and ignited by the opposition” (Muzilova 2017), meaning the political opposition to Russia’s national government. Some of the critics of the proposed law were the targets of menacing words, and one of those who said that she had received threats was Galina Khovanskaia, the chair of a committee in the national Duma (Sergeeva 2017a). In May some journalists reported that the government of the city of Moscow had ordered the collection of *kompromat* (compromising material) to damage the reputations of the organizers of a protest against the project of renovation (*Newsmsk.com* 2017c; Sergeeva 2017c). It was also reported that there were numerous physical attacks on citizens who openly opposed the project of renovation (Ibid.; Voronov 2017i; Akhmedova and Tiazhlov 2017). In June, *Kommersant* said that conflicts between supporters and opponents of the renovation of housing were taking place in many districts in Moscow (Akhmedova 2017). It probably was common for the chief executives of the districts of Moscow and their supporters to try to put pressure on reluctant residents to vote in favor of the demolition of their homes (*Newsmsk.com* 2017e; *Newsmsk.com* 2017g).

Arkadii Liubarev, a member of a group of experts in the Central Election Commission, said that such attempts to exert influence on the choices by apartment dwellers were not regulated by any laws, and that in each apartment building there was “an *aktiv*, connected with the city government or the protest movement” (Sardzhveladze and Makhukova 2017). In August, Liudmilla Butuzova complained that the authorities had used their “legal, administrative, and propagandistic resources” (Butuzova 2017b) to exert pressure on people who disagreed with the program of resettlement. Such behavior was not consistent with the assurance from Sobianin that if the residents of a building voted against participation in the program of resettlement, “we are not preparing to touch them; live peacefully, no one will bother you” (*Newsmsk.com* 2017h). The statements by federal officials who sought to appease people who feared losing their homes also contrasted with the words of Viacheslav Volodin, the Speaker of the Duma, who called the opponents of resettlement “irresponsible intriguers and demagogues” and alleged that those who attended protests against that plan were paid to do so (*Newsmsk.com* 2017i). After the publication of the list of buildings whose residents were said to have voted for resettlement, some people complained that their apartment buildings had been incorrectly included in the list of those whose occupants had voted for the demolition of their buildings (Mishina 2017c; *Newsmsk.com* 2017; Lipin and Galiamina 2017; *Newsmsk.com* 2017m).

**Maneuvering: Revisions and Concessions**

The public outcry about the proposed renovation stimulated hasty maneuvering by the city’s leaders and the national government, which produced many revisions in the law on renovation. Under pressure from below and above, the government of Moscow showed an increasingly conciliatory attitude, as it made a number of concessions to residents of the city who were apprehensive about the project of resettlement. Mayor Sobianin assured those whose apartments had been marked for demolition that any of them could move to an apartment in the same district (*raion*) in which they were living (Raibman 2017a). Later he told the residents of Moscow, “the law on renovation is being reworked, taking into account the opinions of citizens and the public” (Churakova and Liauv 2017). He added that the new apartments for those who would be resettled usually would be not only in the same district as the old ones, but even within the same block (*kvartal*) of buildings, and within walking distance (Mishina 2017a). (In August Khusnullin said that he was sure that from 85 to 90 percent of those who would be resettled would remain in the same microraions in which they had been living (Liauv, Vinogradova, and Boletskaia 2017).)

In early May the city government released a list of buildings that might be demolished, which included 4,546 buildings. That represented a substantial decrease in comparison with the number that had been published initially (Raibman 2017b). (It was noted at that time that only 55 percent of the apartments on the new list were actually khrushchevki. Later, *Gazeta.ru* (2017) reported that there were no clear criteria for classifying any building as dilapidated (*vetkhii*), so it would be possible to destroy “practically any home” in the program of renovation.) Sobianin also tried to reassure those who feared that they would be moved into apartments in very tall buildings, as he announced in May that the new buildings would be from six to fourteen stories high (E. Petrova 2017a). (However, Marat Khusnullin, the deputy mayor of Moscow who is responsible for construction policy, later said that some of the new buildings would be as high as twenty stories (Krupnov 2017), and in late June, *Kommersant* obtained information specifying that the new apartments would be in structures of three types, with nine, seventeen, or twenty-five floors (Gerashchenko, Mertsalova, and Aminov 2017). Another official source later revealed that as many as one fourth of the new buildings would be over fourteen stories high (*Newsmsk.com* 2017p).)

The city government also specified that the decision to demolish a building could be made only with the approval of the residents in at least two thirds of the apartments in the building (Sborov 2017). Another change that was introduced by Sobianin was the promise that those who were to be resettled could choose between getting either a new apartment of equal floor space or one of equal market value (*Newsmsk.com* 2017b). He also pledged that the residents of an old apartment that would be demolished would be guaranteed the choice of moving into a new apartment or receiving financial compensation corresponding to the market value of their present apartment (E. Petrova 2017b2017c). Marat Khusnullin added further reassurance when he promised that there would be parking spaces next to each of the new apartment buildings, and that parking in those places would be free (*Kommersant*). On May 13, Sobianin presented the draft of a new law for the city of Moscow that was supposed to add protection for the rights of residents in apartments that were designated for demolition (Liauv 2017b). After Moscow’s Duma approved that law, Sobianin signed it on May 18 (*Newsmsk.com* 2017d).

As a result of the controversy about renovation, various institutions and leaders became involved in the revision of the proposed law. According to *Vedomosti*, the presidential administration was following the situation and was discussing it with the government of Moscow and with committees in the Duma that were considering the draft law on renovation (Churakova 2017c5). It was reported in May that Putin had assigned responsibility for supervising the process of revising that law to Viacheslav Volodin, the head of the Duma (Sergeeva 2017b). On May 23, the government sent its revisions in the law on renovation to the Duma, including a provision giving the residents of an apartment that was to be demolished the choice between receiving a new apartment with equal space, an apartment of equal money value, or financial compensation equal to the market value of the old apartment (*Novye izvestiia* 2017c). Those revisions also removed the earlier limits on the right of residents to seek judicial defense of their interests, and eliminated the exclusion of the renovation project from compliance with federal laws on requirements for construction and regulations upholding sanitary norms (Liauv 2017c). The degree of Putin’s involvement in the work of revising the draft law on renovation was suggested by the disclosure that in a phone conversation with Volodin, the president had called for greater speed in the process of revision (Churakova 2017d). In early June, Mikhail Men’, the federal Minister of Construction Housing, and Communal Services, confirmed that his ministry and committees in the Duma had prepared corrections in the draft law on renovation “in close interrelations” with Sobianin’s team and other officials in the government of the Moscow (Men’ 2017). Evgenii Moskovichev, the head of the Duma’s Committee on Transportation and Construction, revealed that the text of the revised legislation on the renovation project had been approved by the presidential administration before the second reading of that bill in the Duma (Sardzhveladze, Kholmogorova, and Okrest 2017).

Meanwhile Sobianin continued taking steps backward; while he had said earlier that all the residents of an apartment building who did not vote on whether to be resettled would be counted as voting in favor of moving, on June 1 he changed his position, deciding that the number of those “silent ones” (*molchunov*) would be distributed in proportion to the votes for and against renovation that had been cast by the other residents in the building (Liauv, Bocharov, and Ibragimova 2017). In the Duma on June 6 there was a hearing on the proposed legislation on renovation in which many people spoke, though none of the leading opponents of that program were invited to take part (Kuznetsova et al. 2017), and *Kommersant* concluded that the speaker of the Duma had closely controlled the preparations for that hearing (Voronov et al. 2017). In that hearing Evgenii Moskvichev said that 144 corrections in the draft law had been considered and 90 percent of them had been accepted, so that, in his estimation, “in fact, the deputies had written a new law” (Sardzhveladze, Kholmorova, and Okrest 2017). However, one speaker was out of tune with the other leaders’ efforts to reassure the opponents of renovation; Dmitrii Kozak, a First Deputy Prime Minister, warned his audience “not to absolutize the right of property in an apartment” (*Newsmsk.com* 2017j). The Duma approved the bill on renovation at the time of the third reading of that proposed law, on June 14, 2017, by a vote of 399 members for, two against, and one abstaining (Grobman, Voronov, and Karelin 2017; Solovichenko 2017). In his “direct line” television broadcast to the Russian people on June 15, Putin did not field any questions from viewers about the renovation program, but in response to a query from the moderator, he declared, “it is important that the rights of citizens not be violated, and above all, the right of property” (*Newsmsk.com* 2017l). He added that he felt that Sergei Sobianin shares the same outlook, and he emphasized that it is important for the Mayor of Moscow to ensure that his subordinates follow that approach.

Soon after Putin made that pronouncement, the government of Moscow announced the results of voting on the program of renovation by the residents in the 4,546 buildings that had been listed for demolition. That voting had approved of the inclusion of 4,087 buildings in the program, while residents in 452 buildings had chosen against the replacement of their apartments (Sardzhveladze et al. 2017; Liauv and Korzhova 2017). The Federation Council, the upper house of the national legislature, approved the legislation on the renovation of housing on June 28 by a wide margin (Korchenkova 2017). Vladimir Putin signed the bill on renovation into law on July 1 (Demchenko 2017). Before and after that date, however, some people complained that their apartment buildings had been incorrectly included in the list of those whose occupants had voted for resettlement (Akhmedova, Mishina, and Aminov 2017; *Newsmsk.com* 2017m; Lipin and Galiamina 2017). In early August the city government announced that 1,082 buildings that had not been listed in the program of renovation but whose residents had voted for the replacement of their buildings had been added to the list of those included in the program, bringing the total to be replaced to 5,144 (Liauv 2017d). There are about 350,000 apartments in those buildings, and more than one million people live in them. The fact that not all those apartments are khrushchevki was underlined by the information that some of those buildings date from the 1980s and a few were built in the 1990s (Sardzhveladze, Makhukova, and Nemchenko 2017), and some of them are nine stories high. The list of buildings that will be demolished was updated again in October 2017, as thirty-seven more were added to the list on the basis of voting by their residents before July 1, and four were removed from that list in accordance with the wishes of their residents, giving a new total of 5,177 buildings that will be demolished (*RBK* 2017).

**Property, Housing, and Protests**

The protection of the right of ownership of private property was the main theme of the movement against the proposed program of resettlement in Moscow. An important part of the historical background for that movement was Nikita Khrushchev’s promise in the 1950s to provide a separate apartment for each family in the Soviet Union, which was followed by a huge program of construction of housing. Vitaly Mikhaylyuk recalls, “the new flats gave ordinary people private spaces for the first time, instead of the communal apartments that housed several families at once” (Mikhaylyuk 2017). Much later, another change further intensified the feeling of ownership of an apartment, with the privatization of housing in post-Soviet Russia in the early 1990s. Although most Russians did not react favorably to the privatization of industry, the privatization of housing was popular among citizens of that country, in the view of Maksim Artem’ev (2017), since “people believed that now they were becoming the owners of housing, which they could dispose of at their discretion.” As he puts it, “in Russia the notion was formed of the necessity of having one’s own piece of housing, even though a small piece.”

The reaction of many Muscovites to the draft law on the renovation showed that the feeling of ownership of their apartments was very powerful. After all, for most of them, the apartment was by far the most important piece of property that they possessed. In the words of an article in *Kommersant*, privatized apartments constitute “the basic capital of millions of citizens” (Sukhov 2017). Or, as Oleg Goriunov wrote (2017) when he discussed the legislation on renovation, “for the majority of owners who are touched by that law (around 1.5 million people), the apartment is the only property having significant value, and also the only housing.” That point was reinforced by another source (*Newsmsk.com* 2017o): “housing (the dwelling) remains the only property for the overwhelming majority of the population.” Aleksandr Labykin quotes Mikhail Veller as saying, “an apartment is practically all the property (*dobro*) that exists for the overwhelming majority of the Russian population, and that apartment was obtained by the sweat of the brow” (Labykin 2017). An apartment is not only a piece of property for the people who live in it, however; it also constitutes the personal space of those residents, protecting a feeling of security and providing a refuge from the instability of the outside world. Explaining why Sobianin’s proposal for resettlement raised fears among many residents of older apartments, Valeriia Mishina (2017b) pointed out the “social resonance” coming from the threat of destruction of a settled style of life, and the fact that the program ‘touches the personal space and property of millions of urbanites.’” Perceptive observers have suggested that a part of Vladimir Putin’s implicit bargain with the people of Russia is the assurance that the political regime will refrain from intruding in their personal lives (Lipman and Petrov 2010). In fact, Putin has endorsed the position that “the state should not intrude in moral, family, and everyday life” except in cases of extreme necessity (Evans 2015, 423). Yet recently the regime’s adoption of a socially conservative ideological position has induced it to come close to infringing on the terms of that bargain. And for some people in Moscow, the plan for demolition and resettlement stepped over the line. In the words of Aleksandr Baunov (2017), “the authorities, approaching ever closer and closer to people with ideological and moral supervision and control of the mass media, this time irreversibly violated their personal space.”

The protests against the renovation program in Moscow were a reaction to a plan by that city’s government that would have an impact on citizens with consequences that they would feel every day, for better or worse. The movement against resettlement arose in response to a specific and concrete problem, and it had a specific and concrete focus. As journalists of *Gazeta.ru* pointed out (Atasuntsev and Kalinin 2017), in the protest against renovation on May 14, 2017, “the majority of people came with concrete demands.” Those protestors focused specifically on the proposed law on resettlement, and did not demand sweeping changes in the national political regime. Denis Volkov remarked in May 2017 that the anti-resettlement protesters “have a very specific problem and they want it solved” (Litvinova 2017).

It is significant that the participants in the movement against resettlement in Moscow did not call for the head of the national regime, Vladimir Putin, to leave office. On the contrary, some of them explicitly appealed to him to intervene in order to solve the problem that troubled them. Evgenii Budnik, a deputy in a district council in Moscow, sent a letter to Putin, asking him “not to sign a law that contains norms violating the rights of citizens, which are secured in the Constitution” (Miller 2017). To provide a basis for his appeal, he quoted Putin’s answer to a question about renovation. Both the fact that Budnik directed his request to Putin and the fact that he cited Putin’s own words to support his cause implicitly showed respect for the president’s authority. Similarly, one group that opposed the project of renovation suggested that the Moscow Duma appeal to Putin with a request to take the program of renovation in Moscow “under personal control” (Voronov 2017k). In Russia as in China, asking national leaders to intervene in order to correct the improper behavior of local officials is a way of signaling that dissatisfied citizens are complaining about specific policies without directly challenging the authority of the national regime (Evans 2016b). The fact that the anti-renovation protesters frequently referred to the constitution and laws of Russia as a basis for the legitimacy of their demands also signified that they recognized the authority of the state. In fact, the general attitude of the protesters in Moscow last spring was in favor of seeking dialogue with the state. In Denis Volkov’s assessment of the participants in the anti-renovation movement, “the majority of activists are not against the state, but are for dialogue, and come forward so that the state will take their opinion into account” (Mukhametshina 2017a). One of the people who took part in an anti-renovation demonstration emphasized, “the meeting was held in order to obtain some sort of answer from the government,” and his statement was said to be typical of the responses from participants in that protest (Mishina 2017b). The objective of dialogue with the authorities implied some hope of negotiating with them and reaching a satisfactory agreement (Litvinova 2017).

Indeed, the national leadership and the government of Moscow did make a series of concessions to the movement that had arisen in response to the draft law on renovation that was introduced in the Duma in March. The protests against that proposal at the grass roots level were followed by an extraordinary amount of frank criticism of the draft by individuals and institutions within the political elite. Perhaps the most remarkable part of the response to the furor over the resettlement program was Vladimir Putin’s threat not to sign a law authorizing that program unless it was substantially revised. After that blunt warning from the president, officials in the presidential administration, ministers in the government, and the Speaker of the Duma (who had been selected for that position by Putin) were closely involved in revising the proposed law. As a result, several provisions of that legislation were changed, in an attempt to calm the fears of the residents in old apartments that had been chosen for demolition. Some of those who had been among the most vocal critics of the proposed program shared the view that those revisions represented meaningful concessions. Daniil Lipin and Iuliia Galiamina (2017), two leaders of the Staff for the Defense of Muscovites, have asserted that “the active resistance of Muscovites changed the law itself,” and that the final edition of that law “gives conscious and active property owners somewhat more possibilities to defend their rights.” Those activists also argued that the changes in the law by political leaders should be seen as significant achievements by the protest movement. “If there had not been any meetings, marches, round tables, or continual questions, those concessions would not have been made” (Ibid.).

What was the source of the motivation for those protests and questions? It was a perceived threat to the security of tangible property in people’s homes. Recently Russian citizens in a variety of movements have been driven to protest in order to defend the ownership and use of private property (Evans 2017), and that motivation has been particularly strong for the critics of the program of renovation of housing in Moscow. The importance of the idea of private property was demonstrated not only when it became the central theme of those who criticized the proposed resettlement project, but also when the leaders of the city of Moscow and the national government desperately tried to reassure everyone that private property would be protected. The fear of a threat to the possession of the property that was embodied in people’s apartments had stimulated a sudden burst in civic activism in Moscow. That activism had begun at the grass roots level. The remarkably rapid growth in mobilization among residents of Moscow was described by Igor’ Zotov: “A great role was played by the citizens’ self-organization of Muscovites ‘by buildings,’ ‘by courtyards,’ or ‘by districts,’ in social networks or offline, and by initiative groups that distributed leaflets with invitations to come to a meeting” (Zotov 2017c). The requirement that the residents in a building that was selected for destruction should vote to decide collectively on the fate of their building prodded previously passive residents into action. Konstantin Remchukov argued that “the activism of citizens who have taken part in the voting in the program of renovation may be called unprecedented” (A. Petrova 2017). Daniil Lipin and Iuliia Galiamina (2017) believe that heightened activism can be counted as an important achievement of the struggle against the renovation program; “it is a new round (*vitok*) of activity and an increase in the level of self-organization of society.” At present it is impossible to know how much that level of activism will persist, but it is safe to say that the example of that struggle will be remembered. When large numbers of citizens engage in vigorous protests, and the decision makers in the state grant concessions to try to placate those citizens, that experience sets a precedent. It sends a message to the population, as described by Abbas Galliamov: “The most unpleasant consequence for the authorities is the understanding arising among people: If you want to defend your rights, go to the street” (Vinokurova 2017c). Precedents of concessions to protesters can create heightened expectations for the potential results of future demonstrations (Luk’ianova 2017) expressing the discontent of groups in society.

**Conclusion**

In Russia today the main goal of a wide variety of protest movements is the defense of the ownership and use of small-scale private property. Much of the coverage of protests in Russia in recent years has created the impression that protesters in that country are devoted to the principles of democracy and that they seek to transform the character of their national political regime. Yet most protests in Russia are actually focused on specific policy goals, reflecting disruptions in the daily lives of substantial numbers of citizens. The reason that many protests in Russia concentrate their attention on specific issues affecting people’s everyday lives may be explained with reference to the concept of *resonance* in social movement theory. Scholars who have developed theory in that area of research point out that a social movement is more likely to win support from a group of people if the *frame*, or framework of interpretation that it presents in order to put a problem in perspective, resonates with the values and attitudes of the members of that group (Snow and Benford 1988). In other words, a frame needs to fit with the thinking of its potential base of support in order to be credible and persuasive for people in that base. Usually it is more likely that the frame of a protest movement will resonate with its potential base of support if it focuses on a problem that has a direct impact on the lives of the members of that base.

A variety of issues with direct effects on groups of people in Russia have aroused citizens to take part in protests in recent years. Certainly not all those issues have involved threats to the ownership or use of property. But the protest movements that have arisen in recent years to defend private property should suggest the need to address some questions. For example, it would be worthwhile for scholars who devote time to the study of Russia to explore the subject of attitudes toward private property among the people of that country. How much can the beginning of an attachment to possessions be traced back to an earlier period, as Vera Dunham suggested many years ago (1976, 1990), and if so, how has that attachment changed during recent decades? In particular, what have been the effects on attitudes towards housing among members of Russian society of Khrushchev’s program to provide a separate apartment for each Soviet family (Attwood 2010, 154; Zavisca 2012, 29), and of the privatization of formerly state-owned apartments since the early 1990s? And more broadly, if economic change in the post-communist period has heightened the importance of some types of privately owned property for many Russians, does that present problems for the semi-authoritarian political regime in that country? And still more broadly, in comparative perspective, as semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes in many nations are committed to capitalist economic development, do such regimes face a challenge in dealing with citizens’ desire to protect property rights, and how do different states try to cope with that challenge? Sergei Taranov (2017), paraphrasing words from Petr Shkumatov, has asserted that until Rusians’ attitude toward the ownership of an apartment or other property changes, officials (*chinovniki*) will dictate to them where to live, and to the “subordinate (*podnevol’nomy*) will remain only the possibilities of thanking, bowing down, or suing.” That statement suggests that respect for the ownership of private property can strengthen protection from the arbitrary exercise of authority. We do not know how widely that idea is accepted in Russian society. But certainly there can be tension between the desire to defend property ownership and the style of operation of a semi-authoritarian political regime.

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