

## Deep Russia: Made the Scapegoats: what Russians criticize local authorities for

*What Russians discussed on "VKontakte" and "Telegram" from July 6 to 12*

**Period** July 6–12, 2026

**Platforms** VKontakte, Telegram (regional communities)



## Key findings

**The information week in Russia's regions once again centered on the fuel crisis:** queues, limits, gasoline sold "by license plate number" and via QR codes. The worst is in Temporarily Occupied Crimea: 95-octane officially costs around 200 rubles per liter, at some private gas stations — 240–245, from resellers — up to 380–400 in cash, all against a backdrop of rolling blackouts that lasted the entire week. The second major topic of discussion was the weather: tornadoes and downpours swept from Kaliningrad to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The provinces "drowned" most loudly: in Tver the railway station went underwater, and a child died during the storm. The third big theme is the war reaching deep into the rear: a drone threat was declared for the first time in Novosibirsk Oblast and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and drones reached Omsk — about 2,500 km from Ukraine.

**The main target of Russians' daily anger is local authorities.** Over six weeks of monitoring (June 1 – July 12), everyday criticism aimed at local administrations is roughly five times greater than criticism of the center. The triggers vary: from clogged storm drains and housing and communal services tariffs to gas-station queues and the lack of shelters in case of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks.

**The reverse movement — public discontent of local authorities with the center — is scarcely recorded.** Over six weeks, the monitoring databases turned up not a single case where a governor or mayor directly complained that the center offloads unbearable tasks onto the regions: army recruitment, shelters, protecting enterprises from drones. Demonstrative loyalty dominates: fire teams are created "on the president's instructions," anti-drone equipment is bought "from the regional budget." For a regional official, a public grievance against the center can mean the end of a career — [the May resignation of Belgorod governor Gladkov](#) (formally "of his own accord"), who had allowed himself to publicly criticize the Ministry of Defense, became a reminder to others.

**Discontent does seep through nonetheless — but indirectly, and not from governors.** In that same Belgorod Oblast, reports spread that the regional air-defense unit "Orlan" was being disbanded because the budget "can't cope"; the authorities denied this, but the oblast is indeed seeking a loan of almost 5 billion rubles to cover the deficit. The thesis that "the war is eating up regional budgets" is voiced aloud only by deputies of the systemic opposition. Here and there, criticism of the Kremlin, which has "given up on" the problems of its own regions, seeps through in comments from ordinary people, but not from officials.

**The fuel crisis has made governors the face of a problem they did not create:** they announce limits, "odd-even" schemes and coupons — and therefore absorb all the anger for it. Overall the lightning rod works: the anger is channeled to the level nearest and safest for the system — the local one. Grievances against higher levels (Putin, "United Russia," Moscow), though they appear more often against this backdrop, still show no readiness to translate into action.

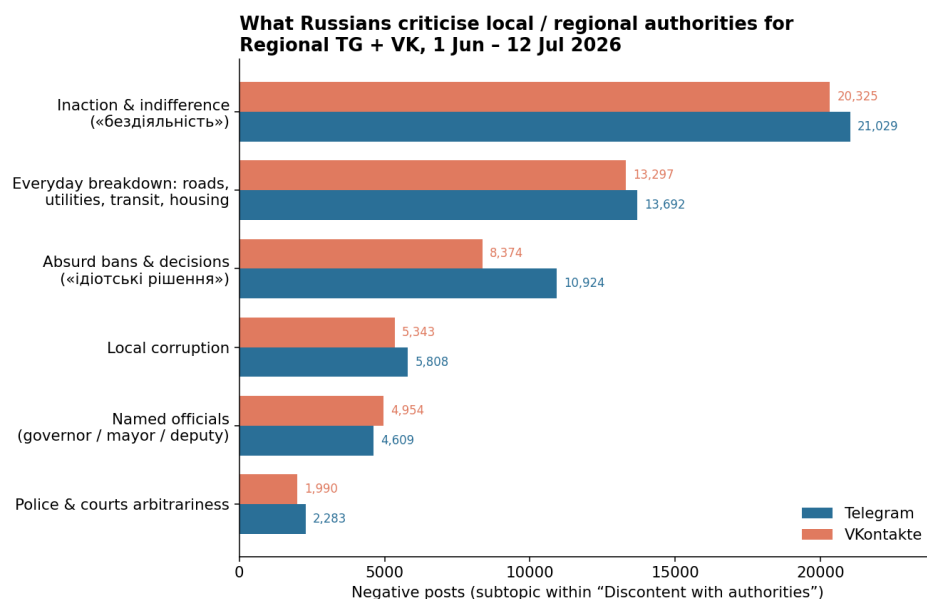
# 1. Made the Scapegoats: what Russians criticize local authorities for

## What the monitoring databases show

This time we looked not only at the reporting week but at six weeks (June 1 – July 12): on Telegram that is 247,000 posts across 411 channels, on VKontakte — 221,000 posts across more than 500 communities. The questions were as follows: to whom is the criticism addressed — local authorities or the center, and for what exactly. And also — is there any visible discontent of local authorities with the tasks "dumped" on them from the center, and did they display that discontent in any way.

Everyday criticism of local administrations exceeds criticism of the central government by roughly fivefold (on Telegram ~49,000 posts versus ~9,700, on VK ~43,000 versus ~8,300). The logic of the split is fairly simple: in the regional worldview the "center" is responsible for the abstract — the war, the exchange rate, prices in general — while local authorities are responsible for everything visible from the window: whether the yard flooded, whether there's gasoline at the station, whether the garbage was taken out.

The set of grievances against local leaders is stable. The largest part is inaction or the imitation of activity: the summer downpours produced dozens of identical storylines — "the city flooded, the storm drains are clogged, and the local authorities did nothing to protect against it." Next come everyday problems: tariffs, roads, transport, housing. Standing apart are "idiotic decisions" such as selling gasoline by license plate number. And a recurring theme is corruption: a flood means "they embezzled the money meant for pumps," while a road repair means "a botch-job contractor" in cahoots with the officials who announced the tender.



The mechanism of shifting problems from the center onto the regions is quite telling: the center "offloads" onto the regions everything that is unprofitable to implement or problematic. The Kirov governor [is creating mobile fire teams](#) "as part of the president's instruction to protect the region's critically important facilities"; Leningrad Oblast [is buying anti-drone pickup trucks](#), emphasizing that "the funds were allocated from the regional budget"; Kaliningrad — is opening its own ["ministry of regional security"](#). After reviewing several hundred posts over six weeks in which a government actor was mentioned alongside markers of friction or lack of funds, not a single one was recorded in which a regional official publicly called this burden unbearable. The closest to fiscal complaints is Belgorod Oblast: reports spread in the public groups that the "Orlan" air-defense unit created by the predecessor was being disbanded because "the regional budget can't cope"; the authorities [officially denied it](#), however, the oblast is quite openly seeking [a loan of 4.9 billion rubles](#) to cover the deficit. Only deputies of the systemic opposition — the Communist Party (CPRF), the LDPR, "A Just Russia" — say aloud that the war is eating up regional budgets, and very cautiously.

Public criticism of the center is suicidal for a governor, so discontent, if it exists, lives in the behind-the-scenes bargaining over transfers and subsidies, which social media cannot capture. Our monitoring databases, meanwhile, are mostly non-political regional public groups and the comments under them: they record public statements and grassroots moods, not backroom conversations. So, to sum up as accurately as possible: in the open information space, regional officials demonstrate loyal compliance and an absence of complaints. Open sources confirm exactly this picture: the regions' discontent manifests in actions, not words — [the quiet reduction of payments to contract soldiers](#), "optimizations" of military spending, and businesses' resistance in the courts: it was on July 9 that it became known that [three Kirov factories were fined](#) for falling short on the "mobilization reserve" for protection against drones — the factories' lawyers challenged the quotas themselves, citing the constitutional freedom of labor.

## Observations of regional analysts

According to the aggregated findings, Russians most often criticize local officials for housing and communal services, roads, transport, and corruption, and this summer — for gasoline and shelters. Among the examples: in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, after [the deaths of people following a drone attack](#) the question "where are the shelters and why don't the sirens work" is addressed personally to governor Nikitin. In Belgorod Oblast there is much criticism of the new acting governor Shuvaev: he is compared to Gladkov, not in Shuvaev's favor. In Samara Oblast, governor Fedorishchev is seen as "a Kremlin overseer" who failed to extract protection for the oil refineries from the Ministry of Defense; in Tolyatti people write outright that the city with its factories is undefended. In Murmansk Oblast, where Putin's name in the comments is still taboo, the role of "main enemy" for the population is played by the governor. And in Temporarily Occupied Crimea, after a week of blackouts, commenters are already openly calling on local officials to "leave their posts if they are incapable of doing anything."

**Belgorod**

Viktoria Dankova · Jul 8 at 15:05 · ♥ 141

*"Gladkov was a real man! Slept 4 hours a day. He'd peer into every crater, every window blown out by a drone... And who's this new guy? A "warrior".. we've heard all about his exploits.. go look up info on him online... damn, there's nothing there..."*

**Tolyatti**

Alexander Kirpichnikov · Jul 12 at 8:01 · ♥ 25

*"It's as if the governor, together with the Ministry of Defense, never managed to set up effective air defense"*

**Perm**

Marina Kuznetsova · Jul 9 at 12:33 · ♥ 83

*"Put the governor in the queue) let him stand a couple of hours with the people )"*

Maria Noskova · Jul 9 at 13:25 · ♥ 52

*"The governor and his gang should resign 🇷🇺"*

A separate question: is there any visible discontent of the local authorities themselves with the center? This is practically imperceptible: "one hundred percent executive discipline." "He avoids all topics where conflict with Moscow is possible" (about Bashkiria's Khabirov, who stays silent even on topics sensitive to the local public, such as the transfer of republican assets to federal structures). The exceptions are isolated and demonstratively cautious: the speaker of the Nizhny Novgorod Legislative Assembly, Yevgeny Lyulin, allowed himself a rare-for-the-system [public statement under his own name](#) — he called for "not unsheathing nuclear weapons" in response to the attacks and declared that "the Special Military Operation is obviously nearing its end"; in Tatarstan comments, the tally occasionally slips through: "the republic gives 75% of its revenues to the federal budget — why aren't our oil refineries protected." But even this comes from voices at the bottom, not complaints from the executive vertical against the center.

Resentment toward the center, by contrast, is clearly audible from the population. Under Aksyonov's statements about the need to treat the fuel "situation with understanding," Crimeans write out lists of what else one ought to "treat with understanding" — for instance, the difference in prices for that fuel (70 in Moscow, 300 on the peninsula). The occupation administration, meanwhile, only raises the temperature: compensation for the blackout was promised only to those who went [without electricity for 48 hours straight](#), commenters immediately noted that "now it's clear why the power was switched on for 5–10 minutes." When an adviser to the occupation head of Crimea explained the crisis with the words "a war is going on," he was reminded that an ordinary citizen faces a "discreditation" case for such a phrasing. Krasnoyarsk residents, meanwhile, demand that the governor and mayor say where the city's bomb shelters are, and answer their own question: "the answer will be — endure it."

**Temporarily Occupied Crimea**

Olga Krasilnikova · Jul 8 at 15:43 · ♥ 30

*"The people treat with understanding the fact that private construction is far more*

*important than people, that gasoline is dispensed only to certain important people (unclear for what merits), that Crimea is in no way protected and (in your own words) definitely won't be defended. One should also treat with understanding the fact that prices have skyrocketed and no one is going to control them (or is it your favorite line — "everything is under control")."*

*Mestny Schitel · Jul 10 at 12:35 · ♥ 25*

*"The main thing is that it's 70 in Moscow, and they don't give a damn about us — we can fill up at 300 rubles too))"*

*↳ Wladislaw Dorkin · Jul 10 at 13:53 · ♥ 16*

*"Local, if it's any consolation to you, the capital doesn't just not give a damn about us — they don't give a damn about absolutely everyone but themselves. They don't care about defending factories or ports, about the impossibility of harvesting because of the fuel shortage, and they don't care about the near future either."*

**Krasnoyarsk**

*Vyacheslav Yuryevich · Jul 7 at 5:18 · ♥ 37*

*"Well, at least they have a metro, somewhere to hide, but what are Krasnoyarsk residents supposed to do if something happens? Won't the governor or the mayor comment on this?"*

*↳ Andrey Konovalov · Jul 7 at 5:26 · ♥ 15*

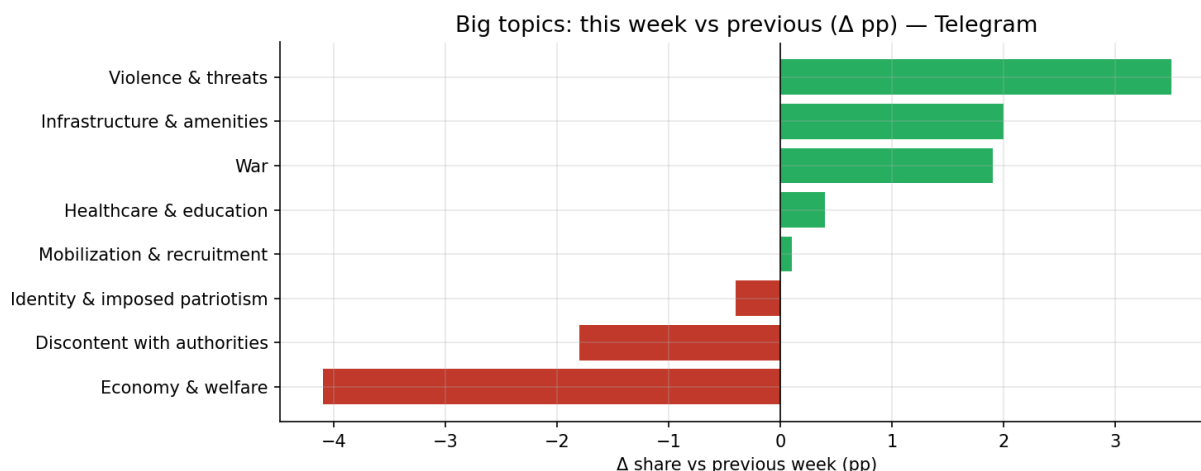
*"Vyacheslav, the answer will be — endure it."*

## General observation

The system of lightning rods in the form of local authorities is so far working as intended: local authorities absorb both everyday anger and the tasks handed down from above, while friction within the vertical is channeled downward — into gubernatorial ["dressing-downs" of mayors](#) — and not upward. A public revolt by governors is probably not to be expected; what should be watched are the indirect markers: quiet cancellations of payments, "optimizations" of defense spending, lawsuits by enterprises against quotas, the rhetoric of the systemic opposition in regional parliaments. The most likely triggers capable of upsetting this equilibrium are a new wave of mobilization or a deepening of the fuel-and-budget crisis in the autumn.

## 2. The week in Russia's regional "VKontakte" and "Telegram"

### Topic activity on Telegram



### The week's main critical discussions on Telegram and VKontakte

#### *The fuel crisis, act three: coupons, "license-plate numerology," and governors in queues*

During the monitoring week, reports about fuel problems ceased to be news as such and became more of a statement of the new normal. In Kirov Oblast, governor Sokolov introduced, as of July 11, the sale of gasoline ["by license plate number"](#) — before that, by his own account, [the driver of his official car spent seven hours in a night-time queue](#). The "odd-even" scheme was introduced in [Lipetsk](#) and [Astrakhan](#) oblasts. In Nizhny Novgorod Oblast gasoline is sold by coupons via an app, in Perm Krai [gas stations stopped filling jerrycans](#), whereas Leningrad Oblast, on the contrary, ["permitted" jerrycans](#) — metal ones and up to 10 liters. Tatarstan, meanwhile, agreed to provide [an additional 700 tons of gasoline for Kirov Oblast](#) — and this "help" drew a storm of outrage from Tatarstan residents, who are themselves standing in queues for gasoline.

The Russian state responded, as usual, with moralizing: State Duma speaker Volodin [called for "not playing into the enemy's hands"](#), while the propagandist Simonyan [recalled the ration cards of the 1990s](#). In the comments, such moralizing was not appreciated: people tallied up deputies' bonuses and asked why, in the 21st century, they had to live "like cavemen."

**Perm**

Maxim Shumansky · Jul 8 at 23:42 · ♥ 103

*"In 2020 you couldn't buy a mask without a mask*

*In 2025 you can't buy a VPN without a VPN*

*In 2026 you can't buy gasoline without gasoline... what else will United Russia come up with next... though the further it goes, the more curious how this insanity ends..."*

**Nizhny Novgorod**

Elena Bugrova · Jul 7 at 16:11 · ♥ 72

*"And it'll be like with the coupons for a doctor's appointment — booking opens at 7:00, and by 7:01 there's not a single coupon left"*

**Kazan**

Kira Vyshinskaya · Jul 12 at 12:50 · ♥ 34

*"Some get bonuses of 2 billion, and others get consolidation, patience, and an invitation to march into the trenches. Some kind of so-so justice, that is"*

**Omsk**

Alina Lindi · Jul 8 at 12:09 · ♥ 141

*"We're not f\*\*\*ing in the '90s! It's the 21st century! Maybe we could finally live in civilization, and not like cavemen."*

↳ Nikolay Khrustalev · Jul 8 at 13:47 · ♥ 33

*"Alina, well that creature Simonyan definitely lives with all the benefits of civilization — she's the one telling ordinary people not to whine"*

A separate source of irritation is the unfairness of distribution: the queues don't apply to everyone. In Pskov people were outraged that at a gas station near the traffic police "their own" were fueled up without queuing.

**Pskov**

Elena Zinovieva · Jul 9 at 8:58 · ♥ 71

*"Well, what did you expect? The more bans, the more corruption and cronyism. There you go — sign for it"*

***Drones over Siberia: there is no more deep rear***

On the evening of July 6, [a drone threat was declared for the first time in Novosibirsk Oblast](#); that same day [drones reached Omsk](#), and alerts were also declared in Sverdlovsk Oblast and, for the first time, in Yamal, where the public is not yet used to it and is asking the authorities where the shelters are. In Kemerovo Oblast the authorities urged residents to "be on the alert" and [published maps of shelters](#) — in the comments people replied that these shelters are non-existent, because "the basement is always locked." The reactions were mostly bewilderment ("did anyone actually get an alert?"), sarcasm (a drone flies to Siberia for some seventeen hours — and no one intercepted it), and ridicule: blocking Telegram and WhatsApp did not protect against drones, and the money spent on that would have been enough for "more than a dozen air-defense systems."

**Kuzbass**

*Tatyana Kemerovskaya · Jul 6 at 13:14 · ♥ 231  
"So blocking Telegram isn't helping after all?"*

*↳ Gazelistka Iz-Kemerovo · Jul 6 at 13:15 · ♥ 143  
"Tatyana, it didn't help 😊 Neither Telegram nor WhatsApp."*

*↳ Tatyana Kemerovskaya · Jul 6 at 13:19 · ♥ 150  
"Gazelistka, with the money spent on the blocking you could probably have set up more than a dozen air-defense systems"*

*Konstantin Lobanovsky · Jul 7 at 6:57 · ♥ 123  
"Some crazy stuff is going on — a drone flies at 150–180 km/h, it takes about 17 hours to cover the distance from Ukraine to Siberia, and in all that time no one can intercept a droning hunk of metal?"*

Where drones do reach and strike, the public demands a "harsh response," but another aspect is also noticeable — a grievance against their own state, which failed to protect them. In Samara Oblast, where [on the morning of July 12 drones struck Syzran](#) (with casualties), under the governor's sympathetic post people wrote not about revenge but about the price of the war for Russians themselves.

**Samara**

*Valery Valeryev · Jul 12 at 8:06 · ♥ 68  
"Why are you all making noise? Everything is going according to Putin's plan. From his bunker he knows better."*

*Yuri Nikitin · Jul 12 at 8:17 · ♥ 66  
"No one cares about Russians' lives ((("*

**The elements**

A series of tornadoes and downpours — including a cyclone that entered via Kaliningrad — swept from the Baltic to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The epicenter was Tver, which was hit on July 11: [a flooded passage at the railway station](#), trees torn out by the roots, a bus stop blown away by the wind, and [the death of a seven-year-old child](#), on whose tent a tree fell. In Yekaterinburg [a cinema was flooded right during a screening](#), in [Ufa, the first heavy rain](#) showed that the city effectively has no drainage. The reaction is the same — accusations: the moment it rains, it becomes clear that the urban improvements were only cosmetic.

**Tver**

*"Year after year the storm drains on Victory Avenue don't work — the old system is buried under asphalt, and the new one is being designed based on financial considerations."*

***"Let someone else do the fighting"***

The theme of avoiding military service rose simultaneously in almost thirty regions. Among the examples: [the story of a Tyumen man](#), who paid almost two million to break his own arm with a kettlebell and avoid going to war, disputes about the "honor" of service, advice to stay away from anything military. The state itself provided fresh pretexts: St. Petersburg draft offices [are recruiting "shooters" for mobile fire teams](#) — a three-year contract, from 180,000 a month, a 500,000 bonus for a downed drone, and the remark "This is not the Special Military Operation. This is Petersburg and the oblast." The audience does not believe the latter. The government also [approved a bill on involving conscripts in firefighting](#). Contract advertising in Altai openly promises that they take the convicted and those with infectious diseases, and that foreigners are granted citizenship. The public mostly points out that there is a severe shortage of manpower, discusses a potential mobilization and their own desire to stay away from such recruitment drives.

### **St. Petersburg**

Milosch Kostitsch · Jul 10 at 14:38 · ♥ 51

*"Except the Ministry of Defense isn't an office. You'll go wherever they order you to, regardless of what was in the ad. And you won't be able to quit whenever you want."*

Danil Wolkow · Jul 10 at 14:29 · ♥ 43

*"better to keep away from all this military stuff — you'll stay in one piece"*

### **Murmansk**

Valery Korobov · Jul 9 at 9:33 · ♥ 58

*"So... They've roped in the medics. Found free firefighters. Who's next in line?"*

↳ Mikhail Motor · Jul 9 at 9:38 · ♥ 32

*"Valery, the officials... they're a bunch of blockheads anyway, put conscripts in their place — it won't get any worse."*

↳ Felix Dzerzhinsky · Jul 9 at 10:10 · ♥ 27

*"Mikhail, the officials aren't blockheads — they know what they're doing. Otherwise they wouldn't have real estate abroad."*

### **The army as a way to escape accountability**

In Petersburg, a court [suspended the case of a man accused of murdering a girl](#), lifted the pretrial restraint, and handed him over to the Ministry of Defense — he signed a contract. Likewise in Petersburg, [a man accused of the attempted murder of an artist has signed a contract and is heading to the front](#). Outrage in the comments: people write about "crooked justice." The same motif — the army as a zone where the usual rules don't apply — persists in stories about "Special Military Operation" veterans with a criminal past (in Vladivostok [a man in camouflage threatened with a pistol](#) a woman and schoolchildren; the victim calls him a participant in the "Special Military Operation").

### **St. Petersburg**

Irina Sedykh · Jul 8 at 14:02 · ♥ 44

*"Oh, how I'd love to write about the laws and the country, BUT I'm afraid I'll get blocked again."*

↳ Faizal Ismail · Jul 8 at 15:39 · ♥ 20

*"Irina, exactly. And about the crooked justice. I only have one question: if the victim had been the daughter of one of the judges — would the verdict have been the same? Would they have let him off to the front without punishment?"*

### ***A celebration against the backdrop of war***

July is the season of city-day celebrations, and this year they have become an irritant. Tver [announced the program for its 891st anniversary](#) with Chicherina, Kornii, and IOWA; Miass [celebrated the anniversary of the "Ural" automobile plant](#) with Ivanushki — and each time in the comments the same reaction: it is inappropriate to celebrate when people are dying. A telling contrast: in Kaliningrad, by contrast, City Day was awaited — as a rare chance to "get distracted from it all."

***Tver***

*"What a great time to be celebrating! Blood is flowing like a river! What are you doing?! It's disrespect to the boys who died! To those who spend five years of their lives in the trenches in fear of death!"*

## Methodology

**What this project is.** Systematic monitoring of moods in Russia's regions — with a focus on critical and negative posts as an indicator of what irritates, frightens, or outrages people. The conclusions rely on two parallel sources.

**VKontakte.** Observations of analysts working in regional Russian VK communities — in selected regions of all eight federal districts of the Russian Federation, as well as in Temporarily Occupied Crimea and the Temporarily Occupied certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

**Telegram.** About 410 regional Russian channels — regional news channels, city public groups, oblast media, local "chatbots" with audiences ranging from a few thousand to tens of thousands of subscribers. Coverage — all Russian regions and the occupied territories of Crimea and certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

**Quotes** in the text of the report are given verbatim.