In the first half of 2007 there was no significant change in the balance of political forces in the Rostov Oblast (region). Governor Vladimir Chub continues to be the most influential political leader regionally, demonstrating full loyalty and fidelity to the federal centre. The top priority of his administration is the preservation of political stability in the region. It is expressed in total control by the authorities over the socio-political dynamics, rapid reaction to suppress any emerging opposition sentiments, and maintaining the power monopoly of the United Russia (Edinaya Rossiya) party. These are the tools that practically exclude any possibility for other political groups and players to participate in the political process at the regional level in a meaningful way. Therefore, as can be seen on the graph, country (region) stability remains constantly on a very high level. During the municipal elections held in the Rostov region on 11 March in 12 districts, candidates from United Russia party were running in all but one of them. In Belokalitvinsky district, a candidate from the communists (KPRF) was registered. The remainder of 27 regional subsidiaries of Russian political parties did not participate in the elections. In the run-up to the forthcoming elections to the State Duma in December 2007, the regional authorities are trying to strengthen positions of the United Russia party even further. It is explained, apparently, by their perception of the need to prevent a recurrence of the situation that was observed in March at the regional elections in Stavropol region, where “Just Russia” (Spravedlivaya Rossiya) party won. Realities that stand behind the authorities’ concerns are reflected by statements made recently by the head of the Rostov subsidiary of this party (registered on 1 February) that the number of its members in the region will soon reach 30-50,000. The number of United Russia members is currently 31,000. Also, the leadership of the regional subsidiaries of “Yabloko” and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) have been re-shuffled, while the Union of Right Forces (SPS) party, after a three-year long period of stagnation, has organized a rally on 15 April in the Rostov-on-Don city for the protection of fair elections and corresponding legislation. Since April, participants of the United Civil Front (UCF) movement in Rostov have suffered from measures by the local law enforcement bodies aimed to limit UCF’s increased activism. Representatives of the opposition movement “Other Russia” were unable to realize their planned acts of protest in the city of Rostov-on-Don which was timed to coincide with the meeting of Russia’s State Council in the city on 29-30 June. The rally under the slogan “Down with the extremism by authorities!” planned on 24 June and the “Dissenters’ March” on 30 June were banned under the pretext of late submission of the requests to hold the rallies. The organizers of these events as well as 15 members of the coalition have been detained by police.

The security situation in the region remains stable. Isolated cases of violent ethnic clashes that occurred in 2006 between the permanent inhabitants of the oblast and new migrants from the North Caucasus republics did not reoccur in 2007. However, violent action by extremist youths has become aggravated. On 27 April a group of 12-15 skinheads attacked 4 musicians of “2 Shots” band, which participated in the antifascist rally “Food instead of bombs”. This attack resulted in one musician receiving 8 knife wounds.

In general, measures taken by the regional authorities to ensure the security of the population appear to be sufficiently effective. In June, a CCTV security system “Secure city”, covering the city’s key gateways and locations such as educational and health establishments as well as strategic objects, started to operate in Rostov-on-Don. Real time monitoring would allow to react promptly to emergencies as well as to recover the course of events retrospectively.

In 2007, an inter-regional information centre for the All-Russia integrated system for informing the population in place of mass concentration of people (OKSION) was created in Rostov-on-Don. This center is the third of its kind in the South Federal District (in addition to the ones in Astrakhan and Pyatigorsk). The implementation of this project in the South Federal District is scheduled to be completed in 4 years.
Despite the increased amount of funding from the federal and regional sources allocated for the social sphere as well as different social programs initiated by authorities, the quality of life for the majority of the population in the region has not improved. Average salary in Rostov Oblast in January-February 2007 was 7954 rubles (US$315), which is well below the national average. The material circumstance of most pensioners remains very difficult with an average pension being 2700 rubles ($107). Delays in salary payments continue in spite of the demonstrative but ineffective actions by authorities. The amount of salary arrears at the industrial enterprises as of beginning of June reached 40 million rubles (USD1.6 million), having increased 22% in one month. The number of employees affected by salary lags also increased from 1,800 to 2,400 people. Entrepreneurial activities within the population are developing slowly. Although the small businesses in the region appear to be influential economic players and the authorities are demonstrating interest in assisting the development of this sector (for 3 years in a row Rostov Oblast receives awards for the active legislative and organizational support to SMEs), the middle class does not play a noticeable role in the social, political and cultural life of the region. Standards of life also remain unsatisfactory in the region. Despite the increased construction of housing in the region, the share of housing targeted for the low-income families is extremely low due to the local authorities being unable to effectively use the funds allocated for this purpose. The water-supply network is exhausted (50% in some towns; 60% in coal mines towns) and the situation continues to worsen. All these factors result in negative demographic dynamics: population decline and migration does not compensate the reduction but, on the contrary, tends to aggravate the demographic situation as the out-migration exceeds the incoming migration. The most active part of the population gets involved in protest action in order to influence authorities to take effective measures on pressing problems. One such problem is judicial protection of citizens’ rights. An increasing number of citizens choose to take their cases to the European Court of Human Rights. As of 1 January 2007, 57 complaints out of 157 from the South Federal District were filed by the residents of the Rostov Oblast. 99% of these complaints were related to the infringements upon judicial procedures and regulations made by courts. In half a year (from January to June 2007) ECHR satisfied approximately 30 complaints filed by residents of the Rostov Oblast. This has eventually made the problem with the judiciary an issue for the regional authorities. In February, the region’s parliament passed a law "On HR Ombudsman in Rostov region", and on 20 April Anatoly Kharkovsky – an acting prosecutor – was approved to fill this position.

Environmental problems are very acute in the region, while the authorities’ formalism in resolving them does not help improve the situation. One of the key problems – in fact, a looming catastrophe – is recycling of pesticides, as well as industrial and medical waste. The regional administration has developed projects to address this problem, and some of the industrial enterprises also have come up with solutions. The most topical issue at present is combining the efforts of the authorities and business sector.

As a result of active civic action in the city of Taganrog, a compromise was reached between the company "Yugtransitservice" – that was responsible for the worsening of air quality in this town as a result of the company’s petrochemical reloading business – and the city administration. The company has agreed to pay 15 million rubles to fund social programs and paid almost 25 million rubles into the local budget in taxes.

Key economic indicators demonstrate a continuation of positive tendencies: growth rates on many indicators exceed the Russian national average. The coal production has noticeably increased. A new mine was opened in March by the company "Donugol" – "Sherlovskaya – Naklonnaya". The amount of investment to modernize the production facilities by large companies has also increased. Rostov Oblast, as a result, occupies the 2nd place in the South Federal District as to production output. The regional economy has also become more balanced.

The above mentioned trends towards further political stabilization appear set to continue. It is important for the administration headed by Vladimir Chub as it creates conditions for assuring a long-term continuity in power succession in the region, connected with access to opportunities for receiving certain dividends from the large business working in the Rostov Oblast.

In the near future, the regional authorities will focus their efforts on improving socio-economic situation in the region, as the absence of positive dynamics in this sphere is the key factor leading to the growth in social tensions, worsening of inter-ethnic relations, decreasing popular trust to government and other negative trends that discredit regional authorities in the eyes of the Kremlin.

In the run-up to parliamentary elections, activism of political parties will begin to grow rapidly, especially on the part of United Russia ("Edinaya Rossiya") party, the victory of which in the region (as well as in Russia as a whole) is practically certain, not least because of the association of this party with the current stabilization.