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Signals of Adaptive Social Readiness as a Cornerstone and a Driving Force of Russian Authoritarianism

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to show the relationship between, the features (in cultural, sociological and political science terms) exhibited by contemporary Russian society and the political regime (in holistic terms by J. Linz), that existed in the Russian Federation (in the years 2007–2015). We assume that an evolution from stable contemporary Russian society to amalgams system combining elements of authoritarianism with dictatorship has taken place during this period. We point out the essential features that constitute the nature of Russian society and social behavior of political importance. Referring to the theory of “the state in society” by D. Migdal, We put the thesis that it is just the Russian way of thinking resulting in certain behavior, that causes the permanence of contemporary Russian society with a tendency to move on the line continuum toward totalitarianism. Proving that Russian society is not a civil society, but a state society, we determine the structure, the role and the modes of operation of Russian intra-system opposition.

Keywords: Russian society, social communication, adaptation, political system of RF, authoritarianism, totalitarianism

Сигналы социальной готовности к адаптации как фундамент и движущая сила российского авторитаризма

Аннотация

Цель статьи – показать взаимосвязь между особенностями современного российского общества (культурными, социологическими и политическими) и тем, какой политический режим (целостный взгляд на Дж. Линца) существовал в Российской Федерации (в 2007–2015 гг.). Предполагаем, что в то время произошел переход от стабильного авторитаризма к гибридной системе, сочетающей элементы авторитаризма и диктатуры. Мы указываем на существенные черты составляющие характер, менталитет и связанные с ними способы поведения российского общества и их системообразующую роль.

Ключевые слова: российское общество, общественная коммуникация, приспособление, политическая система РФ, авторитаризм, тоталитаризм

Persistence of authoritarianism in Russia causes growing concern in the proximal and distal international environment. Thus, a task of the analysis of the Russian socio-political system formation is still current. After 2014, the need to recognize the nature, objectives, and expected consequences of the direction of the observed changes in the system of the Russian Federation has increased.

The study of the political system can be based on two different assumptions. According to the Weberian recognition, we can assume that ideological principles, political processes in the country and economic relations adopted by the power elite determine the condition of society, determining his way of thinking and perception of reality. Instead, we can adopt a different point of view: it is society which creates a system. In other words, the type of political system and its evolution in the highest degree is a derivative of thinking and behavior of society. Trying to show the relationship between how does the political system in Russia is shaped and the nature of Russian society we accept the second perspective. It is close to the concept of Joel Migdal. He claimed that the condition of the state is a consequence of the condition and the situation of its society. At the same time the social situation – from ordinary worries of everyday life to the opportunities for development in various domains in the long run – depends on the variable balance of power

between people and groups deciding on the rules on which the social order is based. Society constantly follows these changing rules, showing greater or lesser level of readiness to accept and respect them (Migdal, 2001, p. 11). As we separate and name the characteristic behaviors of the Russian society, remaining in close relationship with its mentality, we treat them as a signal about its readiness to submit to the imposed rules. We also affirm that these signals of social readiness to adapt to the rules of the authoritarian system are in fact stabilizing and strengthening it.

When examining the political system, four subsystems can be distinguished, which identify four problem areas: institutional, functional, regulatory and communication one.

In the systems approach focused on communication, which we adopt in this article, it is important to identify social behaviors that constitute interaction between elements of the system related to the realisation of its goals and being the cause of specific decisions at the output of the political system (Langer, 1977, p. 43).

If we put the political regime on a continuum between two ideal types: democracy and authoritarianism, we must assess the extent to which the relationship between society and the ruling elite is of surrender-subordination type. In the approach we have chosen is important to identify those ideas and principles governing of social behavior that have the greatest impact on the acceptance by the public posture of submission to arbitrary decisions and imposed top-down solutions. We assume here that it is the social situation and mindset of society that determines the degree of willingness to accept authoritarian or democratic solutions.

Assuming that the political system of the Russian Federation, regardless of any official declarations, from the beginning exhibited features of an authoritarian system, we hypothesize that the stability of the authoritarian system in modern Russia results from the persistence of traditional (in the straight or transformed form, different conceptual variations) collective, tribal and statecratic thinking of Russian people. This thinking provides a high level of legitimacy of power in the conditions of a specific law. The basic question arising here is the essence of Russian thinking i.e. what special features, in relation to social and political realities in the Russian Federation are the most conducive to preserving the authoritarianism in this country?

The chronological framework of the analysis presented here spans the period from 2007 to 2016. Within this timeframe one can observe the evolution of the Russian Federation regime based on the introduction of solutions characteristic of the totalitarian regimes into the framework of hard authoritarianism. In effect, in 2016 the Russian regime can reasonably be called a hybrid between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. The second question, relevant to this analysis, concerns the evolution of the political system of the Russian Federation in the aforementioned period. What changes within the system, which in 2007 showed features of a mature and stable authoritarianism, led to its tilt toward totalitarianism? We assume that the breakthrough moment when the Russian system gradually started to exhibit features of a totalitarian system occurred in 2012.

From the beginning the political system of the Russian Federation, regardless of the official declaration, had the characteristics of an authoritarian system. In 2007, the Russian authoritarianism reached a very high degree of stability. Hence the chronological framework of presented analysis covers the period from 2007 until 2016. At that time, there has been a shift from “Perestroika 2” model (a government program for the modernization of the state announced in 2009 by President Dmitry Medvedev) to the model of “Stalin-light” (see Lipman, Petrov, 2012, p. 580). After 2012 the Russian system gradually began to show features of the totalitarian system. There has been a shift from “Perestroika 2” model (a government program for the modernization of the state announced in 2009 by President Dmitry Medvedev) to the model of “Stalin-light” (see Lipman, Petrov, 2012, p. 580).

In this article authoritarianism is understood in a holistic way, according to the concept of Juan Linz, where the political system and the social aggregate is treated as an inseparable whole (Linz, 2000). Just like Linz, we assume that both the structure of political and social awareness and the level and type of social activity are interdependent. We draw attention to the lack of structured and formally announced rules of behaviour characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Instead, there is an eclectic set of ideas and concepts and a relative liberalism controlled by the elite in power (Bankowicz, Tkaczyński, 2002, p. 19).

We treat the totalitarian regime as an extreme form of authoritarian regime. The authoritarian regime in its ideal form, unlike the moderately

authoritarian regime, leaves no area beyond control. This is possible thanks to it mobilizing and involving in its preservation all members of the system, not only the elite and not only in the formative stages of the system, but throughout its duration with a similar intensity. Ideology stimulates this mobilization – thanks to it, the dynamism of the regime is maintained and it forces the interactivity of all people in the totalitarian state.

Political system of Russian Federation (2007–2016)

From the beginning the political system of the Russian Federation, regardless of the official declaration, had the characteristics of an authoritarian system. By 2007, the Russian Federation gradually (after 2000 more strongly) increased control over society and nationalist tendencies. There were slogans of national revival of and somewhat less exposed slogans of “gathering the Russian lands”.

Russia has become a country where a small group of people had an impact on power, while the appearance of the existence of democratic institutions were maintained. In 2007 Russian Federation describes itself by the concept created in 2006 by Vladislav Surkov as a “sovereign democracy”. This name indicates the basic characteristics of the regime: the primacy of sovereignty over democracy and the development of democratic institutions, different to Western standards.

Instead of democracy there has been developed “competitive authoritarianism”, where various interest groups included in the apparatus of power and / or power structures fought to increase the range of governance (Levitski, Way, 2002). In 2007 the stability of authoritarianism resulted from three factors: the level of subordination of Russian society, the quality of decision-making processes and the quality of financial, demographic (high immigration) resources. They should also include the mutual loyalty of corrupt ruling groups (see: Bäcker, 2014). Elections were rigged, and civil liberties violated. Democratic institutions were facade, but in 2007 they still allow for the existence of opposition groups, which in favorable conditions, could take power, or cause a crisis of power.

In 2012. Russian regime strengthened becoming a hybrid between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. The ruling elite based its action on three

pillars: personalize power, its connection to the property and imperialism (Shevtsova, 2012). According to Marcel H. Van Herpen Russian system was a hybrid combining classical fascism (extreme nationalism, the idea of national revival, imperialist revisionism), senior proto-fascism or bonapartism type (secret police, the existence of formal multi-party system with a weak top-down controlled parliament, focus on enlarging the territorial country, actions military outside the country), and modern twentieth-century populism (electoral manipulation, psychological brainwashing controlled media). In fact, the policy in such system is privatized and there is established rule of a single party, which caters the interests of the ruling elite. After 2012 the oligarchism of autocratic system increased, which resulted in the escalation of the importance of informal ties, corruption and nepotism (Mommsen, 2012, p. 80–81).

In the light of the latest theory, the system of the Russian Federation after 2012 are also referred to as a conservative monocentric authoritarianism. During the change of the Russian president the power elite tried to maintain the gains of the previous era through the use of repression, but also measures bearing signs of liberalization. The remedy for progressive power crisis, corruption and a decline in support for the party United Russia was to be developed in the Kremlin “Conservative Project”. In addition to the ideological layer it contained a number of legislative proposals aimed at strengthening the presidential center, taking tighter control of business elites and administrative and social mobilization (Słowikowski, 2014). Russian authoritarianism has been also strengthened as a result of militarization of state, progressing from the takeover of the Ministry of Defense by Anatoly Serdyukov. It had military, economic, political (increasing the role of the armed forces as pressure groups and the security apparatus), social character and by shaping social patriotic attitudes. Therefore, from 2012 we can speak of military authoritarianism in Russia – in the state apparatus dominated by “actuators” and other militarized structures. The study of Roman Bäcker shows that after 2014 totalitarianism of system manifests itself in the presence of elements of totalitarian political gnosis expressed in the language of politics. It now contains the wording appropriate for Soviet era (especially the “foreign agents”, “traitors of the nation”; from the new terms, unknown in Soviet times should be distinguished “unwanted organizations” – foreign

associations protecting of human rights). In the middle of 2015 in Russian Federation occurred combination of two political regimes – the hard military authoritarianism and the rapidly maturing nostalgic elements of Stalinist nationalist totalitarianism (Bäcker, 2016).

The Russian mentality as an activator of the Russian authoritarianism

Persistence of authoritarianism in Russia is an important part of the tradition, which is based on a way of seeing and feeling of reality by the Russians. In many respects, it differs from the method of reasoning formed in Western countries and societies. The phenomenon of Russian thinking is the subject of many interesting analyzes (see: A. de Lazari, 2000, p.234). Among its many specific moments I am pointing out only the ones that are the most “aboriginal”, most releasing and preserving authoritarianism in Russia.

Collectivism and post collectivism

Collectivism is one of the basic category of “Russianness”, opposed to Western individualism. Traditionally good of the individual in Russia is understood only in the context of the common good. It is not placed above the good of the community (family, clan, regional, national), but it is integrated with the latter. Hence, the question of individual rights, fundamental for liberalism and democracy, the question of individual is not public or fixed point of reference in the evaluation of attitudes and behavior in Russia.

In the light of Karl R. Popper theory of closed and open societies, Russian society should be regarded as closed, especially after 2014, when there was liquidated or marginalized independent media, prepared cutting off Runet from the World Wide Web and deepened both anti-occidental rhetoric and actions aimed at Russia’s isolation from the West. In Russian society there are no meta procedures that organize in absolute way social and political life. Instead, the decisive role played informal ties, prerogatives and patrimonial solutions (see. Bäcker, 2007, p. 71).

One of the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the cultural change that has brought the development of information technology is a significant loosening of traditional ties. Existing standards governing

social life became seriously disrupted. However the need to consolidate at the family, ethnic group, region and nation level remained, and has even been strengthened. In breach of the traditional order Russians the more want to experience what permanent. Thinking of Russians is post collective, which means that the collectivist value system is maintained under conditions of torn of horizontal ties and destroyed order, that regulated them in a comprehensible and predictable way.

Tribal and post tribal awareness

One of the oldest and basic instrument to build Russian identity, appurtenance and order is the vision of Russia and its social environment as a world of “its” as opposed to “foreign world”, settled by “foreign/ not our”. Tribal way of thinking is based on a very sharp distinction between “us” - “them”. It is the basis for both expansionism (“they” as a resource for use) and xenophobia (“they” as a threat to “us” in “our” habitat). Currently, when traditional social structures break down, and the mechanism of regulation of social life works in incomprehensible and hardly predictable way, tribal thinking takes the form post tribal. This means that the “foreigners” are traditionally refused to trust and “ours” are trusted only partially and conditionally. This is due to the disappearance of the old codes of behavior and their symbols, confirming sense of certainty as to the intentions of “ours” and thus directing and stabilizing relations.

Statecratic awareness

Russians approach to their own country is a sentimental-emotional one. Since the Enlightenment, in ongoing discourse on the historical role of Russia, in which the country is characterized by uniqueness category, messianism and imperialism (now neo-imperialism, post imperialism) you can see the persisting tendency to glorification of Russia. Thinking of it as a country that should not be described in reference to any known model of the state imposes the idea that the policy pursued by the state can not be assessed through the prism of any standards. With still fairly common conviction in Russia of the uniqueness of geography, history, culture, ethnic structure and political system of the country there is a postulated thought that treating this state as privileged one is reasonableness. About how important role in

the social hierarchy is Russian state provides occurring in Russian society a high level of anxiety before any further (after the dismantling of the Soviet Union) the disintegration (Zamarajewa, 2012, p. 232–251). The more efficiently the ruling group manages of manipulation of public moods by dispensing alternating fear of chaos and destruction and the certainty that the state and its position as a global player is strengthened, the greater the degree of confusion and objectification of society. The greater real or even just presumed ability of the ruling government to refrain “dragging on” of the state, the greater legitimacy level of those who exercise it. Russians approach to power is rooted in Byzantine caesaropapism.

Persisting throughout the period of tsarist Russia belief that the ruler is the anointed of God, and his decisions in principle are arbitrary and not subject to discussion, results still very socially acceptance for the mock alternation of power.

Russians approach to law

The authority of statutory law in Russian society is low, much more than legislation count possible actions irrespective of the legislation. The high level of acceptance of illegal activities in Russian society affecting the two simultaneously occurring beliefs:

- 1) failure to comply with the law is a kind of tradition and norm in Russia. This belief is supported by the Russian media. Any violations of law in Russia are intentionally highlighted in them, the scale of the problem is exaggerated. In this way it perpetuates the stereotypical idea of what is normal and what is abnormal.
- 2) The functioning of the rule of law may be unprofitable. This belief feed those Russians who have learned to thrive in a criminogenic environment.

The lawlessness is systemic in Russia. Not as a result of incompetence of the police and the judiciary, but is a phenomenon espouses by purpose. The law is created in such way that its observance was difficult, uneconomical and stimulating violations. It punished only those acts that are incompatible with informal code of conduct against the law. This code is constantly changing. The need to track these changes permanently engaged all participants of this specific law. It is created and perpetuated by the three groups is not

equal players: 1) Those that violate the law in an informally permitted way and those who violate the law in a way that is informally forbidden 2) Those that create informal rules of violating individual provisions of law 3) Those that control the order of changes of breaking law rules and thus exercise control over both: those that do not respect the law as well as those that create the unwritten rules of conduct contrary to the law (Rogov, 2010). This pathological, from the Western point of view, legal order allows the Kremlin team to keep total control over all social groups. The middle class performs relatively fixed layout clientelism (a favor – a payment mainly in the form of the bribe). Other groups have adapted to this legal order trying to minimize the resulting losses and using all possible occasions to gain something.

Society in Russian hybrid system

Assuming that from 2012 the political system of Russian Federation is gradually becoming a hybrid between authoritarianism and totalitarianism we pay particular attention to two elements of the system where clearly there has been a shift to the continuum toward totalitarian solutions.

- Government camp has consolidated around President Putin and adopted a fairly unified anti-Ukrainian and anti-occidental rhetoric, which exhibits the characteristics of political gnosis.
- We observe social passivity in Russian Federation proper of authoritarian system. However, after the occupation of the Crimea in 2014, the ruling elite has managed to some extent to mobilize society around national and neo-imperial idea.

Place of opposition in Russian political system

Authoritarian system in Russia pursues in an exemplary way applied in all authoritarian systems a rule blocking all activities aimed at the conquest of power, undertaken by entities not related to the center of state power. Russian society can articulate its interests, even if they do not coincide with the interests of the power elite, as long as this action does not give a chance to the removal from power of the current team. Russians are thus able to express – individually or collectively – the views of the opposition, but only to the extent and in the form acceptable to the Kremlin and covered by its

full control. Intra-system opposition plays the role of a stabilizer Russian Federation system. It is also a “safety valve” through which passes the accumulated social frustration, and holds Russian system as “sovereign democracy (according to Surkov). The intra-system opposition is focused mainly in the Russian non-governmental organizations (in 2013 there were registered 220 thousand. The most significant are the Memorial, Golos, Demos). In 2001, there was made top-down selection of them, evaluating their performance according to the criterion of “constructive”. Constructive – means that it is useful in the process of stabilization of the system, it is possible to discipline and surrender full control has been incorporated into two structures subordinated to the Kremlin – Civic Forum and the Social Chamber. 1.5 million Russians related with organizations recognized as “unconstructive” were allowed the opportunity to express their demands, but only in matters that Russian society considers to be not very important – in the area of social care, resocialization of offenders, ecology.

In addition to actions of quasi-opposition mounted in the system there exists anti-system opposition. Its representatives come mostly from fascist Movement Against Illegal Emigration (Dwiženija Protiw Nielegalnoj Emigracji) and the fundamentalist fraction of the Orthodox Church. Since 2008, anti-system opposition has been marginalized, with no seats in parliament and free access to the media. In 2014 it was completely broken. It is unable to organize mass actions (Bäcker, 2016).

Therefore, there is civil activity citizenship in the Russian Federation, but that does not mean that there is a civil society. This kind of phenomenon is not located in the Russian tradition. Since 1990, civic activity took the form of organized within the framework of disciplined top-down actions of non-governmental organizations or spontaneous protest movements. The latter in the period from April to May 2014 almost expired.

Social Apathy

In modern Russia, we observe a large level of social apathy (see: Grin, 2012, p. 448). It is one of the mental features of Russian society, which recorded the tsarist regime. Although in the Soviet regime, the level of social mobilization was very high, but at the same time high oppressiveness of the system conducive to perpetuating the attitudes of passivity and conformism. Since

taking of power by Putin in 2000 the society withdrew from visible readiness for political participation during Yeltsin period in return for the provision by the government of peace, social minimum and the relative freedom of action in its own interest without trying to achieve power. Rather high level of social passivity consists of:

- a lack of well-established tradition of civil society
- a lack of transparency and predictability experienced phenomena and situations, which causes the desire to maintain the status quo of individuals and society as a whole
- low social capital, a lack of horizontal ties
- a high level of legitimacy of President Putin power

The economic costs of joining the Crimea to Russian Federation changed the basis for legitimacy. Until 2014, it was based on a client-based system of power and the society in which it was crucial to provide good social conditions. Sanctions from the West and falling prices for energy resources considerably worsened the living conditions of Russians. The legitimacy of Putin's power changes the basis from economic to charismatic one. After 2014 it has been increased attempts of social mobilization based on slogans and great power and anti-occidental moods.

Conclusions

The durability of Russian authoritarianism is a result of well-established tradition of the Russians approach to:

- own state (state interest identified with the interests of the nation)
- state power (legitimacy of charismatic leader strengthening the state)
- statutory law (rejection of the model of the rule of law)
- West (tribal and confrontational thinking expressed in aggressive anti-occidental rhetoric)

Russian society shows a strong level of passivity. In the period 2007–2014 there was a clear tendency to withdraw from the public sphere in a private one. In 2014, the ruling elite has managed to partially break the social apathy and social and get a quite high level of mobilization. It is held by instrumentation appropriate to closed systems. From the 90s to today, there are certain forms of civic behaviors in Russian Federation, but it does not mean

that Russian society is though civil in little level. Before 2014, anti-system opposition in Russia was a margin of the political scene, and after 2014 is broken and unable to act. Intra-system opposition is fully controlled, fulfills the function of stabilizing the system. From 2012, the authoritarian system transformed into a hybrid one, approaching to totalitarian model. The mentality of Russian society, political tradition and the lack of foundations for civil society is invariably a basis on which Russian authoritarianism grows in its subsequent forms.

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