

LEGITIMACY OF POWER OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Russian President is both a political institution of key importance and a distinctive individual of a specific manner of behaviour in his authoritarian rules. In this article I would like to present the role of the President in society with reference to historical heritage and the modern political culture of Russian society. Taking into consideration the fact that public opinion and the media, in conditions of democracy or democratization, constitute basic social mechanism that forms bases and formulas of legitimacy, I have decided that it is merge to join the issues into one. It is the President that I aim my examination at, not the Russian media themselves, the history of their development after 1991, or their ownership structure that governs them. The media will be of interest as long as they are necessary to understand how the President legitimizes his powers, to what extent he is successful, and what scope of success or failure depends on in the legitimacy efforts.

To understand who is the figure and what is the office of the President in Russian society, it must be considered whether he is supported and trusted, and if so, what the basis of this trust and support may be. Trusting people is much more common in Russia than trusting impersonal institutions, yet we have not discussed the causes of such status quo. We also know that general trust has different bases than trust for a specific individual in a particular political role, e.g. the role of the President. President Yeltsin lost his initial extensive trust fast, to regain it temporarily in spring 1996 in the election campaign, finally to lose it almost instantly, never to regain, not even after submitting his authority in December 1999. This interesting line of rise and fall of trust needs an explanation, just as the extraordinary stability of really high

trust and support for President Putin in the last 6 years of power, in spite of considerable and painful failures both in his internal policy (inefficient fight with terrorism, corruption, crime, dramatic social inequalities, huge areas of poverty, demographic crisis of a scale unknown in Russia) and external policy (e.g. failure in the orange revolutions of the years 2004-2005, difficult dialogue with the European Union and deteriorating relations with the USA, losing most allies in his foreign policy even in the area of former Russian republics).

To reasonably answer the above questions, the theory of power legitimacy must be referred to, especially of political power, and of property legitimacy, especially private property. Considering this wider scope of legitimacy problems in contemporary Russia, it will be possible to explain why the President is a foundation on which the fairly fragile structure of legitimacy of the whole system of public authority and of the private property system in Russia relies.

Since democratic legitimacy is based on public opinion, we must accept the hypothesis that in Russia exists public opinion that is a kind of soft power that constitutes an important factor of the cultural background on which stands the institution of presidency, as well as that it fulfils its outward and hidden missions in the public sphere. Of course, the vitality and scope of influence of public opinion on the centres of power, especially on ones as strong as Russian presidency, is changeable and depends on various factors. One of them are the media and shaping of public opinion, thus they had to be a subject of interest for presidents, even more so, since the media always animatedly react to everything that concerns the actions of President.

SOCIAL EVALUATIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS RUSSIAN LEADERS

We did not use to know whether Russian society respected their leaders, if they trusted them and supported them. However, for 15 years, public opinion has systematically been tested, and we do not have to guess to which extent people are afraid of the authorities, and to which they consider them as legitimate, thus worthy of approval and respect, because their right to rule is based on such foundations which in Russian culture were formed as factors to recognise the right to rule¹.

¹ There are authors who claim that public opinion poles make sense only to researchers, since Russian authorities are so arrogant that they ignore the needs and voices of public opinion. This is the opinion of example V. Shlapentokh, *No one needs public opinion data in post-communist Russia*, "Communist and Post-Communist Studies", 1999, vol. 32, p. 453–

The research concerns not only the leaders that are in authority at the time, but the attitude to the former leaders, as well. Thus, they get into social memory of people, which is left in them as either a positive or a negative view of the former Russian or the USSR leaders. Numerous authors claim that the decreasing respect for Lenin or Stalin reflected in the public opinion polls is a prominent factor of the desovietisation of citizen consciousness, moreover, it could be also one of the proofs of consolidation of democracy in Russian culture.

According to the researchers of public opinion, the evaluation of Lenin's role had been changing very slowly, in November 1991 – 59% had a positive opinion of him as a person, and 76% described his role of a leader as positive. In June 1992, in the research that included only the inhabitants of Moscow, there were only 47% of positive evaluations of Lenin as a leader, 22% were indifferent, and 22% negative. In November 1994, nearly two years after the beginning of the market reform, 44% still considered Lenin's role in history as positive, and 29% as negative². In the second half of the nineties, the generation differences in the evaluation of Lenin's actions was becoming more noticeable; almost 70% of were elderly people marked him positively, and 70% of youth – negatively.

The attitudes towards planned and market economy had been changing accompanied by the scope of the implemented reforms, yet the direction of the change in civil attitude was contrary to the direction of the reforms. In February 1992, soon after the beginning of Gaidar's reforms, people were asked if the market or the plan was the better determiner of economy. To the question, 52% answered that the market was better, 27% that the planned economy was better, and 21% was unable to choose an answer. To the same question, in December 1994, only 26% answered that the market was better, 41% chose the planned economy, 26% said it was difficult to specify what was better, and 7% did not give any answer. One year later, in December 1995, 55% of respondents were not against the comeback to the 1985 state of matters, i.e. from before the reform, and only 38% did not want to restore the state of the late USSR³.

Provided the constantly high opinion of Stalin, one of the first and radical critics of Stalinism and Leninism in the eighties, A. Cipko, expressed an interesting opinion on "aesthetisation of Stalinism" by the youth that do not have their own experience with the system and can see in it a symbol of Russia's power, which today is a form

–460. A contradictory opinion is that of M. Wyman, *Public Opinion in Post-Communist Russia*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1997.

² R.W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, University of Birmingham, Birmingham 1997, p. 36, 48, 80.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

of an intellectual escape from the humiliation experienced by the country after the fall of the USSR. No wonder, according to Cipko, that the same youth refers with respect to the Orthodox Church and “aesthetise” Stalin⁴.

Nevertheless, they are neither powerful nor unequivocal proofs of consolidation of faith in democracy as a collection of institutions and decisive procedures (common election, the rule of majority, protection of the right to opposition and resistance against authorities, responsibility of authorities towards their citizens, the legal status of a citizen versus state authorities, approval of political parties as organizations that mediate between citizens and authorities, recognition of the representation of interests by the parliament as correct, resigning from the urge for monopoly of power and search for a compromise as the basis of important public decision-making, acceptance of natural pluralism of views). Firstly, the fall in the support for Lenin and Stalin is very slow and opinions about them remain surprisingly positive. Secondly, the positive opinions about the two key leaders of Russian communism in some periods are expressed even more often than before, which means that there is no one-direction trend of fall of general appreciation of the two former leaders. Thirdly, in the times of deep disappointment with liberal reforms in economy and with the chaotic democratisation of the state, sympathy for the former leaders is on the rise as the reflection of nostalgia for the “good old days”, which are somewhat recognised as not good at all, yet still better than the misfortune experienced after the fall of the Soviet Union and its dominant power in the world. Since a lot of data point at a high level of frustration, dissatisfaction and bitter disappointment, there results a question why there are so few protests and active civil self-defense against poverty and unfair division of goods.

CULTURAL SOURCES OF WEAK SOCIAL RESISTANCE TO SYSTEM REFORMS

Researchers of the USSR and communist systems have created hypotheses on the causes of civil passivity, on the few and poorly organised social protests, or on the reasons of the weak interest in the activity of a small group of intellectuals and artists known as dissidents. One of such hypotheses claims that the passivity and lack of faith in the sense of dissidency had three different sources: general demoralisation and losing autonomic values in favour of the ones imposed by authorities, strong

⁴ A. Cipko, *Nastupayet epokha estetizatsy stalinizma*, “Gulay Polie”, 10.03.2006, www.poliua.ru.

police control of thought and behaviour, and permanent political propaganda without alternative sources of information⁵.

This politological way of explaining focused attention on the external, clearly visible instances of the communist system, though the hypothesis of general demoralisation and being devoid of axiologic autonomy is a further-fetched generalisation. Others claimed that the passive patience of Russian people is the heritage of the past and particular cultural features that render Russians being “born to slavery”⁶. The followers of such views in the earlier centuries claimed even that an unwavering form of tyranny is the proper form of government for the nation of the naturally born to slavery. Such attitudes, formed among the elite of Western Europe between the 15th and 18th centuries remain to have their supporters both outside Russia and inside her borders.

The attitude “tische yediesh, dalshe budiesh”, adapted in life experience, is an instance of a reminiscence of the above explanations of civil passivity. Attitudes of this kind help to keep power in Russia, yet they constitute an obstacle when the authorities want to introduce reforms and innovations. People of considerably extensive status quo adaptory skills reluctantly become followers of innovations and rarely support reforms. This is how the circle closes: an authoritarian reformer feels condemned to supervisory action as a result of lack of social initiative proceeding from the ranks which, when present, are often characterised by an anarchist riot out of despair, and rarely are an instance of an energy that constructively changes institutions and customs.

Among philosophical and cultural studies of the so called Russian mentality, Russian soul or imperial mentality⁷, a distinctive one is the idea of a Russian sociologist, Igor G. Yakovenko, who defines the elements of “Russian mentality” as the following⁸:

1. Syncretic orientation, i.e. general connection of all cultural elements into one nebulous whole in which there are no separate interests, roles, professions, private

⁵ P. Reddaway, *Dissent in the Soviet Union*, “Problems of Communism”, 1983, vol. 32, no. 6, p. 1–15.

⁶ M.T. Poe, “A People Born to Slavery”; *Russia in early Modern European Ethnography 1476–1748*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2000. It is a detailed analysis of a journey to Russia – diaries written by people of the West in the period between 15th and 18th centuries, which presents the birth of stereotypes about Russians and their national identity.

⁷ Such terms are commonly used, though it must be noticed that they are a little meta-physical and it is difficult to use them in empirical studies.

⁸ I.G. Yakovenko, *Doklad na kruglom stolie “Tsivilizatsionnaya spetsifika Rossii-kakim arshinom mierit”*, Nikitsky klub. Tsikl publichnikh diskusiy “Rossia v globalnom kontekstie”, Vipusk 12, Moskva 2003. Compare also an interesting position in the discussion of Russian

property, and even families are not autonomous. A society syncrtetic in culture does not want further autonomisations and separations, but it rather aims at preservation of the state of fusion of everything with all, or it would even desire the earlier forms of union, unvaried, somewhat total integrity. The above fact makes it considerably difficult for civil society to arise, one in which instead of stiff vertical constructions there is a need for a variety of flexible forms of horizontal bonds and sources of autonomous initiative without orders from authorities, or even against their commands. For Russian mentality, the dissolution of the syncrtetic union of all forms of culture, of union of power and property is a terrifying chaos. It is expected that it will be governed by a strong state, by a vertical axis of power or a new polarization in the foreign affairs, due to which there will be order again. The opinion about the power of syncretism seems to be supported by the difficulty of separation among politics, economy and law in such a way where each of the spheres would have its own autonomy. Another example of the tendency is the often described difficulty to introduce the constitutional rule of separation of power in spite of the endeavours to follow western cultures⁹.

2. The Manichean intention¹⁰, which always reduces the pluralism of forms into two sharply drawn options, and can see neither different options nor chances of compromise between the two. Thus, it assumes that either one or the other must fully win. Therefore arises the drastic division into “us” and “them”, our country and all other countries, the strong opposition “an enemy – a friend”, or the Lenin question: “kto kogo pobedit?”. We are always right and only right because we are on the side of light. They are never right, or even partially right because they are on the side of the darkness. An instance of Manichaeism in political thinking is the rejection of pluralist multipolar models and reduction of all variety to only two, the most sharply contradictory positions. Categories such as “imperialist surroundings”, “the fight of socialism with imperialism”, or the faith in “the worldwide plot against Russia” are instances of the Manichean attitude. It is a binary, twofold picture of reality, which lacks more elaborate differentiations or various shades of grey between white and black.

3. Dychotomic division in cultural consciousness as a permanent tendency to separate public opinion into two poles between which there is no real dialogue, yet

mentality A. I. Muzikancky, *Arshin dla Rossiy*, “Rossia v globalnoy politiki”, 2005, no. 3, www.globalaffairs.ru.

⁹ T. Remington writes about different causes of this difficulty, *Politics in Russia*, Longman, New York 1999.

¹⁰ An Iran religious reformer, Mani, in the 3rd century, built a doctrine based on strict contradictions between good and evil, light and darkness, beauty and ugliness.

each of the sides of the distinction (the author says – *kulturnyi raskol*) aims at destruction of their opponent. This tendency hinders compromising decisions and, reminding the life and death conflict between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, it is easier to understand why they dissolved the USSR and were unable to reach a compromise.

4. The pessimist assumption that the world has from the beginning not been free from numerous flaws and it is not possible to remove them with human effort. Such a belief generates passivity, resignation from the public domain into a little circle of family and friends, a sense of hopelessness, historical pessimism and lack of faith in any government or institutional models. We are not going to save the world anyway, so any attempts to make it better or less evil are also worthless in such a view¹¹.

These four points strengthen each other creating a cultural core around which elements of ever alive traditions are built, such as the sacral picture of power or the advantage of extensiveness over intensiveness, a practical instance of which is the urge for expansion and rule through violence over people and nature. In such conditions, the traditional elements of culture, coming from the past, do not disappear and do not dissolve in what is new, yet they last, if only on the outskirts of the main movement of change. The interpretation model by I. Yakovenko allows to explain the lasting of the absolutist tradition in political culture and the accompanying tendency to passive adjustment in social attitudes. The Manichaeism and the power of binary contradictions also explain the short-term relapses of radical and anarchist thinking in Russian tradition, such as “*naplevat na wsyo*”, since “*ni chiorta nie poluchitsya*” anyway.

The strong dependance on the hierarchical vision of the world results in the fact that any power – provided it is strong enough to last – will be tolerated, even supported, though it does not have to be respected or trusted. A kind of cynical obedience makes it easier to rule, but it also supports the low moral value of the people in authority themselves, because the cynical society does not expect them to be such,

¹¹ This fourth feature of “Russian mentality” in Yakovenko’s model seems to be contradictory to the presence of messianist idea in Russian culture and politics: starting from the faith in the Third Rome, through the ideas of the world proletarian revolution under Russian lead, through Russian Zionism with its moral message, to the modern hopes for a new shape of social order with a civilisational centre in the middle Siberia as the capital of northern civilisation. Such ideas for Russia as a new superpower have been propagated for a few years by an academic and a publicist Yuri Krupnov. He is always present in www.kroupnov.ru. Compare the right remarks of M. Niziol, *Cultural Dilemmas of the International Role of Russia*, Lublin 2004. Especially relevant to our studies of Russian presidency are her analyses of the Orthodox Messianism and the imperial syndrome that show how painful was the clash between Russian sense of moral superiority over the West with the inferiority complex of the citizens of the humiliated, fallen empire.

thinking that every power steals, cheats, does not fulfil their promises and it should not be expected that the power chosen by society will be better in this respect than any power nominated by the supreme leader, notwithstanding his title to rule¹².

Considering the mechanism of the lasting tradition of arbitrariness and constraint in the public sphere, it is worth reminding the view of a notable specialist on Russian matters, M. Lewin, who has proved in his numerous works that the Czar Russia had two “unmovable columns” – the autocratic state and the traditionalist peasant society, which have always been an obstacle in the attempts of modernising reforms¹³. Historical arguments strongly support this view, although it is difficult to give credit for the numerous failures of consecutive Russian reformers and revolutionists only to these two factors. They are certainly key factors that inhibit cultural modernisation of Russia, but not the only ones¹⁴.

Yakovenko’s suggestion does not refer to numerous complexes and inhibitions of Russian mentality towards the West. Only partially (Manichaeism) and indirectly it allows to understand the fact that Russians have always considered themselves as victims of aggression from the West, even when they widened their domination to Central Europe after 1945¹⁵. A peculiarity of the mentality is in the fact that they feel as a victim of external powers even when they take part in an external political-military expansion aimed against other countries. It is to experience their own weakness and strength simultaneously, which seems contradictory in itself. This incoherent picture of the world is usually accompanied by inferiority complex and

¹² Sarah Ashwin writes about the phenomenon of patience of Russian workers, *Russian Workers: The Anatomy of Patience*, New York, 1999. Workers organised a starvation strike in December 2005 in Irkutsk, only when their employer fell behind 12 months with their wages. But the potential of protest was considerable also in 2006, since only 4% of the population were satisfied with the situation at the end of 2005. On the other hand, as many as 60% did not have hope in improvement of their own and the state’s situation. L. Shevtsova, 2006, “God budiet” sloznm i dlia wasti, i dlia nasielenya, 27.02.2006 www.poli.ru/news/2005/12/31/Shevtsova_print.html.

¹³ M. Lewin, *The Collapse of the Russian State*, “Le Monde diplomatique”, Nov. 1998. There, Lewin for the first time presents the shape of the theory of red tape absolutism of Stalin. www.monedediplo.com/1998/11/02lewin; M. Lewin, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999.

¹⁴ The importance of cultural instances of the style of leadership was pointed at by a communist system researcher, R. C. Tucker; *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev*, Norton, New York 1987. He analysed the political culture of society, Bolshevik customs, as well as biographical data of leaders, showing how such soft data can explain the structural change.

¹⁵ A. Toynbee, *The Byzantine Heritage of Russia*, [in:] A. Toynbee, *Civilisation at the Time of Trial*, Wydawnictwo Przedświt, Warszawa 1991, p. 116.

desperate search for some reasons for national pride to soften the pain experienced due to the sense of inferiority or civilisational secondariness.

Such a combination of the sense of weakness and strength, if consolidated by tradition in common consciousness, can explain the passive adjustment and difficulties in expressing civil protest, which makes it easier for the ruling elites to retain their power and prevent outbursts of social anger. Literature, in its numerous works, also expresses this specific inability of Russian intelligentsia to act in the period of Romanov Empire. A liberal follower of organic work and shortening the distance between Russia and the West, Ivan Turgenev, in a number of his works shows the paralysis of the will to act in the enlightened levels of Russian society and the tendency for a blind rebellion in the peasant masses. Anton Chekhov defined as the most serious drama of Russian intelligentsia the following: the tragic union of two inabilities – the inability to accept the status quo of autocracy and backwardness and the inability to act to practically change the status quo.

TRUST FOR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND FOR THE LEADERS AFTER 1993

On this cultural-historical background let us consider the data on trust for political institutions in Russia in the nineties.¹⁶

Table 1. Data on the trust for political institutions in Russia in the nineties

Institution	1993	1996	1998	2000 October trust	2000 Lack of trust
President	28	10	11	21	22
Parliament	9	5	7		
Duma				6	33
Federation Council				5	18
Federal government	18	6	8	11	21
Regional authorities	10	11	17	13	20
Municipal authorities	13	8	18	6	16

¹⁶ The table is based on the data coming from website www.fom.ru. The numbers present the provided in the public opinion polls only the full trust for particular institutions. Data on partial support are omitted because they do not change the general proportion between the types of political and administrative institutions.

The data show the generally low trust for any kind of authority, which have been perceived as little sensitive to the needs of citizens, poorly respecting their constitutional rights and preoccupied mainly with clientelist tenders for their own position in the structure of power. Citizens expressed rather lack of trust towards their country, because a lot of them had the right to claim that the state does not trust them and thus deprives them of their influence on the most prominent decisions taken by political elites, which did not respect the opinion of majority. However, in this concern, trust for the President was usually higher than for other institutions, although in 1993, when it was at the highest level in the researched period, it reached only 28%, considerably less than in 1991 when B. Yeltsin was the hero of his people that resisted the coup d'état of Yanayev's group.

Till April 1990, Gorbachev was more popular than Yeltsin¹⁷. Later, Yeltsin had his great days, but after 1993 the level of trust for him was on average 10–11%. Given the condition, his reelection in 1996 was either a sociological miracle, or – more probably – an effect of an enormous propaganda manipulation performed by the media of the oligarchy and of the huge money spent on that purpose from the state treasury and by the oligarchy. Since that moment, he had been perceived not as the President of the people but as a product of oligarchy manipulation. The syncretic union of political power and economic elite produced a president perceived as not worthy of trust, still less evil than his rival, G. Zyuganov. Society did not feel as a subject, an independent actor on political stage, but rather the object of extensive manipulation, which influenced the rise of critical attitudes towards democracy and democrats. Words were increasingly used in an ironic sense. The social alienation of Russian elites reached a dangerously high level, and power of the President, in spite of the won elections, did not have a democratic legitimacy.

In 2000, a distinctive improvement of all the indicators can be seen, since they refer to the presidency of V. Putin. It is striking that the enhancement in the level of trust is double, yet in the beginning, President Putin had only 21% of trust and 22% of distrust. He was welcomed coldly, as if after a rational consideration and with caution, even though he had already been for a few months the President chosen by majority of voters.

In further part of the article we will also take into consideration the data on partial trust and total lack of trust for the President, the parliament, and the federal government in the years 1993–1998, and then we will compare them to trust for the army, the safety apparatus, the system of justice, the Orthodox Church, and the trade

¹⁷ *Reytingi Yeltsina i Gorbacheva po 10-balnoy shkale*, WTsIOM, Moscow, 1993.

unions in the same period. As we will see, the legitimacy of the President was then based on partial¹⁸.

According to the data included in Table 2, every institution has three numbers under the date of the public opinion poll. The first number is the indicator of full trust, the second – partial one, and the third – of noticeable lack of trust. The lacking percentage is the number of people that gave no opinion or did not know what their opinion was. The table is constructed of data announced in respective annals of the official publication “*Ekonomicheskyye i sotsyalnyie pieriemieni: monitoring obshchestviennogo mninya*” of the years 1993–1998.

Table 2. Public opinion on federal political institutions in Russia 1993–1998

Institution	VI 1993	XII 1993	III 1994	VI 1995	III 1996	III 1998
President	28/32/24	20/33/22	20/35/27	6/33/48	10/36/41	11/34/44
Parliament	18/37/21	18/34/22	11/35/26	4/37/41	6/41/32	8/36/41
Government	26/42/17	23/40/18	27/38/17	23/47/17	26/47/14	24/43/19

Source: the author’s own study on the basis of data from “*Ekonomicheskyye i sotsyalnyie pieriemieni: monitoring obshchestviennogo mninya*” from the period 1993–1998

In the years 1993–1998, the full trust for President Yeltsin fell from 28% to 11%, and it was the lowest in Summer 1995, reaching only 6%. Simultaneously, the lack of support for the President was the highest, which can be explained by the disastrous course of, infamous among Russians, Chechnya War.

Trust for the government in that period was falling, just as for the President. Throughout the five year term, V. Chernomyrdin was the Prime Minister. He did not challenge the leadership of the President, in spite of his falling popularity. Given the problems that citizens had to cope with (over 10% of unemployment, loss of all savings by most people as a result of rushing inflation, majority of people were poor and over 40% living in poverty, a crisis of educational and health systems), the full, and especially partial support for the government was astonishingly high. Lack of support for the government was usually expressed by fewer people than for the President. Public opinion was also more critical for the parliament than for the federal government, though the differences were not that distinctive.

¹⁸ The source of the data is a periodical – *Ekonomicheskyye i sotsyalnyie pieriemieni: monitoring obshchestviennogo mninya*, Moscow, years 1993–1998. The table is constructed by the author, due to which it is possible to make comparisons in time.

In the whole analysed period, trust for the safety apparatus was higher than for the President and the whole federal government, since full trust for the apparatus was the highest at the turn of 1993-1994 and amounted to 23%. Similarly, in 1998, the highest was lack of trust for safety apparatus, namely 25%. The indicators are noticeably better than the pace of the fall in trust for the President.

Analysing the experience of Russian society in the middle of the nineties, V. Shlapentokh formed a thesis that the closest parallel for contemporary Russia is early feudalism¹⁹. Just like with feudalism between 9th and 12th century in Europe – according to Shlapentokh – also in Russia in the nineties of the twentieth century the following features arose: agriculture and countrymen, as well as crafts have considerable importance, the state is too weak to fight corruption and tribe-ethnic conflicts. Private business has almost entirely eliminated public interests as the reason of people's actions, and the boundaries between private and public interests have blurred or disappeared. Property and power are inseparably intertwined. Personal relations are more important than relations based on formal roles in political and economic structure, and individual trust is more important than trusting institutions. Obeying the law is something extraordinary. Everyone expects personal gratitude for fulfilling their institutional duty. Regions are very autonomous, and the central power cannot overcome their separatist tendencies and it is only absolutism that can ascertain relative stability. There are no constant rules in the fight for power or rules of power implementation, and everyone that reaches the power can redefine them any way they consider right. The old ideology of patriotism²⁰ and state paternalism from the times of the USSR has been replaced by an ideology of private money making at any cost, following “the rule of the strongest”, in which they do not have to obey any law, not even the law formed by themselves and imposed on others.

“The most striking similarity to feudalism is the behaviour of the official head of state. In every situation he distances himself from the national state by sustaining his own sources of income. A king in the early Middle Ages had his domain... Russian President has also got his own property: his own company that makes use of trade and tax privileges. The company serves his own and his “court's” interests... The leader creates for himself a state within a state, since in both societies the king (nowadays the President) has got his own military units which are not included into national military forces”²¹. Other rich people also create their own private armies

¹⁹ V. Shlapentokh, *Early Feudalism – The Best Parallel for Contemporary Russia*, “Europe-Asia Studies”, 1996, vol. 48, no. 3, p. 393–411.

²⁰ The author claims that “in 1985, Russian nation could perceive themselves as the most patriotic nation in the world, not only in words, but in actions, as well” (ibidem, p. 396).

²¹ Ibidem, p. 395.

that protect their property, life and certainty of safety that the weak state cannot provide. “Krysha” became a norm not only for the new rich and capitalists. The West is such a roof for the rich oligarchy, the President has his “krysha” and he is one for his vassals²². And here, according to V. Shlapentokh, the analogy with the early feudalism ends.

One could hardly accuse this exact analysis of using fake facts, though brought together they have an outstanding power and they completely delegitimize the system of Yeltsin’s superpresidentialism. In his further analysis, Shlapentokh shows that people “hate” politicians, since in June 1995, only 17% of the WTsIOM respondents claimed that the forthcoming parliamentary election is of any meaning for the country, and only 5–10% considered it worthy being a member of some political party. In the first quarter of 1995, only 3% was fully in favour of the actions of the President, 2% – the workings of the parliament, and 1% the workings of the government. It was then when for the first time the number of people against market-liberal reforms outnumbered the number of their opponents²³. In the middle of the nineties, in the opinion of Gen. Kozhkhakov, President Yeltsin entirely stopped reading newspapers and analysing the content of electronic media and he was increasingly isolated from more and more critical public opinion.

An attempt to legitimize the new system by referring to economical success, to an enhancement in the quality of life, or to the positive legal aspect of state authorities was of course impossible, since it was all contradicted by every day experience of everybody. Bringing back the charisma of Yeltsin was also impossible because he quickly lost the popularity and respect of his former followers from the time of rivalry with Gorbachev. His style of leadership was also chaotic and arbitrary, which was similar to some Czars, yet it was remote from democratic models, to which Yeltsin and his closest co-workers referred verbally. Even the effectiveness of reforms, and especially their social results were not usable as an argument that would legitimize state authorities or the President himself. The reforms themselves would need some sensible explanation, and they could not constitute a justification of such a style of ruling. Something that is not legitimized in itself, cannot legitimise a different branch of the system’s structure.

The crisis of legitimacy was certainly realised by elite of the authorities focused around Yeltzin. G. Burbulis, an ex- close co-worker of President Yeltsin, in summer

²² Some of the close co-workers of the President had their own “krysha” in case Yeltsin should lose, and for that reason they co-operated closely with the anti-presidential opposition.

²³ *Ekonomicheskoye i sotsyalnyie pieriemieni...*, op.cit., Moscow 1995, May–June, no. 3, p. 39.

1995, proved that the arbitrariness of authorities causes faster criminalisation of society²⁴.

Social disintegration was growing and the dissolution of state was unfortunately going to deepen in the next term of Yeltsin's presidency. Legitimacy could not be achieved through election rules, economic results, the quality of life of citizens, the effectiveness of ruling or intellectually-ethical characteristics of the leader, since all the bases of legitimacy were shuttered. Even paying attention to national tradition, national pride and support of the Orthodox Church could not help the President. Only the oligarchy understood that they have to do something to rescue their outstanding and easily gained wellbeing. Thus, they did so, financing the media campaigns to support Yeltsin, but the crisis of power and private property legitimacy even deepened after the rescue operation. The system of power worked in an axiologic and normative void and was still dramatically unstable.

After the selection of the new President by the Kremlin elite, social evaluations of his actions came very slowly. Yet, it was not a very clear change for the better. From the beginning, however, moderately positive opinions were in majority, and there were very few negative ones, but the number of "bad" and "very bad" opinions tripled. Moreover, among the positive evaluations, there was no positive modification in the proportion. The first year of Putin brought an advantageous change in comparison to the results of his predecessor, but the social image of the new leader was not any better. It was the same as in the beginning of the first term of the office – good or rather good, but not very good. It is illustrated by the data of the table below²⁵.

Table 3. Evaluation of Putin's work after the first year of his presidency

Evaluation of Putin's work	April 2000	March 2001
Very good	4%	5%
Good	31%	31%
Rather good	41%	46%
Bad	3%	9%
Very bad	1%	3%
No answer	20%	7%

²⁴ Quote from: *Segodnia*, of 1 August, 1995.

²⁵ Research from the Public Opinion Foundation of the 28th April 2000 and the 17th March 2001 on 1500 respondents. FOM (Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniya) data store. www.fom.ru/report/map/events.

Evaluating this first year of Putin's leadership, some people admired his stabilising actions, and one of the Russian generals called him even "Vladimir the Saviour" ("Vladimir Spasatiel"). Foreign researchers were divided in their opinions – most of them appreciated the workings of the President that stabilised Russian system, but critics pointed that the alliance with the oligarchy lasted²⁶, that Stalin was rehabilitated, that the importance of force resorts was growing, that the model idea of a strong state threatens democracy, that he has a professional past of work in KGB, and later his work for 6 years as a deputy of the Mayor of Petersburg gave him too little experience to be a good president, that an attack on the media empire of Gusinsky and Bieriezowsky threatens freedom of speech, as well as that the President is cynical and lies tactically not revealing his true views. According to them, Putin will lead to authoritarian leadership, even worse than the disorderly arbitrariness of Yeltsin, that he is a second Stalin, who had also been hidden until the right moment behind the back of a "Jewish party"²⁷. In spite of the harshness of some claims, we provide here only a few of the critical remarks addressed to the new President after the first year in office. There were many more, often more drastic ones.

In April 2000, researchers from WTSIOM asked Russian people who would their new President rely on in his rule, and these were the answers:

- on Federal Safety Service – 52%;
- on political elite and regional governors – 40%;
- on big business – 22%;
- on directors of state companies – 17%;
- on government officials – 17%;
- on ordinary people – 12%²⁸.

²⁶ At the turn of 1999 and 2000, three of them – B. Bieriezowsky, R. Abramovich i V. Czernomyrdin – were chosen for the parliament in complementary elections in some province, so called ethnic, republics, in which votes were abundantly bought for money and there were no voting protests on behalf of the opponents of the candidates that won.

²⁷ Such opinions were expressed in Russia then by such researchers as A. Prokhanov, I. Klamkin, B. Kagarlicky, D. Furman, E. Afanasyeva, G. Yavlinsky, and outside Russia, e.g. V. Shlapentokh, *Putin's First Year in Office: The New Regime's Uniqueness in Russian History*, „Communist and Post-Communist Studies”, 2001, vol. 34, p. 371–399. Later analyses of Shlapentokh were however less critical and he even polemised with voices of liberal anti-presidential opposition in Russia. Compare V. Shlapentokh, *Two Simplified Pictures of Putin's Russia, Both Wrong*, „World Policy Journal”, spring 2005, p. 61–72.

²⁸ J. Levada, *Ispitatelnyy srok: vremya poshlo*, „Niezavisimaya Gazeta”, of the 12th July 2000. They do not comprise to 100%, because it was possible to point at a few answers to this question.

The views expressed by public opinion, as shown above, were a very close prediction, and they must be seen as a rational and relevant evaluation of the situation. Therefore, public opinion in Russia is a sensitive barometer of the actual processes and it is realistic in its judgement. Yet, it was then full of hope in its prognosis, since simultaneously, in April 2000, as an answer to the question “in what direction does Putin lead the country?” 35% said that towards democracy, 26% – to continuation of Yeltsin’s status quo, and 10% – to dictatorship²⁹.

EXPLOSION OF PERSONAL TRUST – THE PHENOMENON OF PUTIN

In the following years (about 2002), a noticeable breakthrough appeared – the percentage of strong support for President Putin rose, and the good and rather good opinions lessened their relative part in the general number of marks. The President became the legitimizing basis of the whole state’s structure, other organs of which had a considerably weaker support than the President, and thus it is possible to speak of “borrowed legitimacy” of the federal government, borrowed from the President’s account.

Even prestigious failures (death of the crew of the submarine “Kursk”, not efficient enough and often compromising to Russian Army fight with Chechen terrorism, a serious number of fatalities among the hostages kept by terrorists in a Moscow theatre, failure of Yanukovych in Ukrainian elections) have not shaken the high support for President Putin. A good illustration can be January 2005, when after monetization of social gratuities in nature there was a wave of protests among old age pensioners and their political protectors, the support for the President fell, yet subtly³⁰. In the years 2000–2003, his elective potential was a little less than 50%, but after the victorious election for the second term of office it exceeded 65%. After January 2005, once the wave of protests finished, still 43% of citizens claimed that they would readily vote him president again, even though the constitution does not provide such a possibility and it is impossible to be the President for more than two terms in a row. However, if the election took place in spring 2005, and the President could run in them for the third time, he would get 9 times more votes than a nation-

²⁹ WTsIOM, “Internet Biuletien”, April 2000.

³⁰ Nowhere did the number of protesters exceed 10,000 people. The President blamed the federal government and regional authorities, which did not have enough money in time to pay out financial compensations to the entitled individuals.

alist populist, V. Zhirinovskiy, 14 times more votes than a communist, G. Zyuganov, and as many as 43 times more votes than a liberal, G. Yavlinsky³¹.

The President also lost quite a lot of positive opinions of voters, since at the beginning of 2004, 41% of the electorate trusted him, and in January 2005 only 31%³². Nevertheless, no other Russian politician was nearly in a half as trusted as President Putin. Next on the trust list – the minister of natural disasters Shoygu and the leader of communists Zyuganov, who had about a dozen per cent of support each.

To explain the phenomenon of trust explosion for Putin and the extraordinary long period of this high trust it is worth it to go back in time a little.

An interesting fact happened in the beginning of Putin's rule. In January 2000, when he was the Prime Minister, 80% of the respondents valued the PM positively, and when in March of the same year he became President, and the head of the government was Kasyanov, the support for the PM lowered to 50% and it later never rose above this level. This suggests a personal, not institutional kind of trust for President Putin. In 2004, only 30% trusted the government, the parliament about 20%, even the media and health service only 30%. Only military forces had 42% of trust and the Orthodox Church 44%³³. At the time of the above mentioned failures of the President, the sad followers of the President did not replace their trust on some other politician, but then temporarily rose the number of people who declared that they do not trust any politician. And after a short period, the trust came back to Putin. This is another proof of the personal character of the trust: it is not the institution of presidency that Russians trust, but the person, just as they personally distrusted B. Yeltsin after 1993. This personal character of trust must be an effect of perceiving the authority of the President so highly personalised. Personalisation of authorities themselves lead to personalisation of trust or distrust of citizens towards such authority. The trust for politicians of liberal opposition (G. Yavlinsky, I. Hakamada, V. Rizhikov) oscillates nowadays around 3 and 4%, and this is why none of them constitutes a personal alternative for the contemporary President³⁴.

Russian specialists in opinion polls estimated in 2005 that the “normal level” of trust and positive evaluation of the President's actions was 42–46%, and the lowest – 28–25%. The hard core of Putin's electorate are people relatively young, educated,

³¹ FOM, “Biuletien”, of the 20th January 2005.

³² W. Shlapentokh, op.cit., pp. 68–69.

³³ H.H. Schroeder, *Akzeptanz, Protest, Legitimitaet ?*, “Russlandanalysen”, 2005, no. 84, p. 3.

³⁴ Comp. R. Sil, C. Chen, *State Legitimacy and the (In)significance of Democracy in Post-Communist Russia*, “Europe and Asia Studies”, 2004, vol. 54, no. 3, p. 347–368.

successful and wealthy, optimist, and rather unwilling to change their opinions³⁵. It is worth noticing that this group of voters has a high level of identification with such values as human rights, freedom, property, tolerance, work, and success³⁶. The number of strict opponents of the President is estimated at 15%, and the rest are “compassionate pessimists” 19% and “optimist opponents” 2%. Others did not give any answer to the question.

The results of the study by S. Klimova and S. Galicky are transparent enough. It is not because Putin is the President that the numerous citizens trust, but they trust presidency because it is given today to V. Putin. His emotionally cool character, style of rule, the content of his policy and its effectiveness (improvement in the economical situation, prevention of the further disintegration of the federation, strengthening the authority of the country, stressing Russian national interests, even imperial aspirations in foreign policy) are all important for the positive evaluation of the President.

Now is no longer the time of “corpse” authority, as were called the old leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from before Gorbachev and as Yeltsin was called in his second term of office³⁷, but the ruler is an energetic, well organised and resolute man, of whom there is no need to be ashamed. Shame for their leaders used to be for many years a shared experience of the citizens of USSR and later of the Russian Federation. There are numerous instances that show that President Putin is the first, in a long time, Russian leader that people can be proud of, and certainly do not have to be ashamed of his manner of leadership. The need to avoid shame and the accompanying it need to experience pride of their leaders is an important and commonly underestimated factor of high and stable social support for President Putin. He is a person without any outwardly visible flaws in his manner of behaviour and he fits to the model of a person that with dignity represents the office of the president. Perhaps it is the reason why the high trust for him softens the negative results of low support for other political institutions and for private property.

In April 2006, Y. Levada’s research centre raised the question of “how respondents feel about numerous former leaders and the contemporary President”³⁸. The numbers in the table are percentages of answers to this question.

³⁵ S. Klimova, *Reyting priezidenta kak tsiena rieforn*, 15.02.2005, www.fom.ru/report/cat/journ_socrea/number1_05/gur050.../printable

³⁶ S. Klimova, S. Galicky, *Novy podkhod k izuchenyu tsiennostey*, [in:] *Diesyat’ liet sotsyologichetskih nabliudnienny*, Moscow, 2003, p. 72.

³⁷ D. Murray, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

³⁸ Jury Levada, who died in autumn 2006, had been for numerous years the most praised by the public opinion political expert in Russia. The influential and respected also abroad, S. Karaganov, is on the 8-9 place in the rankings, www.levada.ru

Table 4. Attitudes towards Russian leaders in 2006

	admira- tion	respect	friendli- ness	indiffer- ence	irrita- tion	fear	hatred	No answer
Nikolay II	3%	24%	12%	37%	5%	1%	1%	19%
Lenin	4%	31%	12%	28%	11%	1%	4%	10%
Stalin	5%	23%	8%	19%	18%	15%	5%	8%
Khrushchev	1%	12%	15%	49%	12%	1%	2%	9%
Brezhnev	2%	18%	19%	44%	10%	1%	1%	6%
Andropov	5%	26%	16%	36%	5%	2%	0%	10%
Gorbachev	1%	8%	11%	32%	31%	2%	11%	5%
Yeltsin	1%	5%	6%	27%	37%	2%	18%	4%
Putin	9%	45%	22%	13%	6%	0%	1%	0%

Positive evaluation predominates towards Putin – the difference between positive and negative opinion is 69%, Brezhnev 47%, Andropov 40%, Nikolay II 32%, Lenin 29% and Khrushchev 13%. Negative one is in majority towards Yeltsin 32%, Gorbachev 24% and Stalin 2%. The distance between Putin and the positively next evaluated one is big in quality. President Putin got as many as 76% of positive marks, and Brezhnev only 39%, because apparently 44% were indifferent towards him.

It is a bitter paradox that both the ones that partitioned the USSR (Yeltsin and Gorbachev) and the one that had built and widened the empire (Stalin) arise the most negative emotions and receive the most critical judgement. The social memory of Russians carried a punishment for all the suffering and humiliation that people had to experience in connection with the birth and death of the USSR. The traumatic life experience was thus associated with the leader, who was blamed for the suffering that is remembered or retold by older generations.

In the same research there was a question, “was it possible to avoid (nieizbiezhnye) the following events?”. Answers are presented in the table on historical consciousness.

Table 5. Historical consciousness of Russians in 2006

Event	Unavoidable	Avoidable	No answer
October Revolution of 1917	53%	31%	15%
World War II	59%	30%	11%
„Pierestroyka”	27%	66%	7%
Partition of USSR	21%	72%	7%

Event	Unavoidable	Avoidable	No answer
Economical reforms (privatisation, etc.)	21%	68%	11%
Chechen War I 1994–1996.	15%	74%	11%
Chechen War II 1999	20%	69%	12%
V. Putin and his supporters reaching power	51%	26%	24%

The above results show that respondents consider such events as “inevitable”. They have three characteristics: 1. they are completed, 2. people got used to them, and 3. their opinion of the results of the events is positive. What they consider harmful or what they cannot get used to, they evaluate as avoidable events. Consequently, as Y. Levada wrote in his comment, the fact that Putin reached power seems for the respondents as inevitable as the Revolution of 1917. It is noteworthy that five events are condemned: partition of the USSR, privatisation, perestroika, and both Chechen wars. This study, shows also on the background of historical record the scope and depth of support for President Putin. There have not been in modern history many leaders so supported by their citizens as President Putin is since 2003.

This phenomenon deserves special attention and it cannot be explained by referring to the heritage of political history of Russia, or by the theory of learning attitudes by citizens in the process of political socialisation, or by a neoinstitutional perspective, in which people simply get used to new political institutions and after some time, they give them credit somewhat in blanco. Neither political education in youth, nor the nostalgia for communist system could fully explain the phenomenon of extraordinary legitimacy of President Putin’s authority³⁹. To approach such an explanation, it is worth checking the functions exerted by this trust for the President in the dynamics of political system of Russia at the beginning of the twenty first century.

FUNCTIONS OF PERSONAL POPULARITY OF PUTIN AND THE BORDERS OF HIS LEGITIMACY POWER

Personal popularity of the President and high level of trust for him fulfils a few important functions in the political system of Russia. This extraordinary legitimacy potential allows him to be simultaneously:

- a stabilizer of the state authorities structure;

³⁹ On exploitation potential of the theory of learning the neoinstitutional attitudes and theory comp. A detailed study by W. Mishler, R. Rose, *Generations Through Time: The Dynamics of Political Learning During Russia’s Transformation*, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, SPP 412.,2005. www.abdn.ac.uk/cspp/view_item.php?id=412

- a source of credibility of the state's political strategy;
- an absorber of political shock and a factor that softens social dissatisfaction;
- a guarantee of implementation of rules constituted by the parliament;
- a controller of relations between the state authorities and financial oligarchy, and to play a role of factor that limits the strength of the oligarchy;
- a basis of the legitimacy of other state institutions, as well as some political parties, since the trust and support of the President helps to gain the trust of electorate, and thus, personal trust to one man supports trust for institutions in which he is not a part himself. The support of the President granted to some political party is a stronger encouragement to vote for it than: the content of its programme, approval of its action in the Duma of the previous term of office, and the quality of people that run with recommendation of the party⁴⁰;
- the last institution that is able to restore justice to these citizens that feel hurt by any public or private institutions.

In July 2005, an opinion poll was conducted which was concerned with who – according to society – exercises the most prominent authority in Russia. Ordinary citizens and state officials provided the answers. Their answers were considerably different. The results of the poll are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Who owns real power in Russia in 2005?

Real power is held by	People's answers	Officials answers
The President	18,9	32,7
Russian Oligarchy	32,3	16,7
Russian bureaucracy	15,6	12,1
Force organs and other close to the President	12,6	14,0
Political and financial circles of the Western world	8,7	8,9
Russian government	7,1	9,3
Parliament	2,8	3,1
Nation	0,8	1,9

Source: "Russlandanalysen" 2005, no. 81, p. 5–6

There are a few assumptions in the public opinion that could weaken the legitimacy role of the President. First of all, in spite of the rise in the number of people that trust the President, there is a high percentage of those who claim that the real

⁴⁰ H. Hale, M. McFaul, T.J. Colton, *Putin and the "Delegative Democracy" Trap: Evidence From Russia's 2003–2004 Elections*, "Post-Soviet Affaires", of 20 April 2004, p. 295.

power in Russia belongs to oligarchy, and not to the President or his government. Moreover, there is a striking difference in the perception of this situation between state officials and general public, which seems to indicate that officials have a better sense of the rules of political correctness settled in political culture based on propagating democratic values and rules of reign. As presented in Table 6 only about 3% of the respondents believe that the federal parliament has the real power. The numbers show quite a common disbelief in compliance between reality and the rules of a democratic state. A realist view on the fake appearance of numerous democratic institutions seems to be in majority in public opinion.

Even in spite of the rise in the number of people of more stable financial situation, the amount of individuals satisfied with the system of government is very low, this is why they have to “borrow” legitimacy from the President. Thirdly, there is a common belief in society that it is the oligarchy that holds the real power, not the President, which of course limits the legitimizing power of the President towards the whole political system and lessens the capital of trust, of which other political institutions can “borrow” the missing part of legitimacy.

The President has an overload of legitimizing potential towards the needs of validating his own power even in the form of superpresidentialism. On the other hand, most of the authorities institutions, apart from him, have a distinctive shortage of legitimizing potential, and that is why it is supported by indirect legitimacy coming from the President. It is this phenomenon that I call “the borrowed legitimacy”.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEMOCRACY: LEGITIMISING EFFECTS

The basis of a democratic legitimacy of power, including the authority of the president, are free and honest elections, in which most citizens independently decide who and which programme to trust power to, limiting it to the legally specified term of office. An authority is legitimised only by free and honest election, not any election. Secondly, for them to have legitimacy power, it is indispensable to convince citizens-voters that this is what elections are really like and the rivalry among people and programmes is reliable, and the rules of the game are unchangeable, because expressed in the constitution, which binds both politicians and people who do not run for political offices or other authority functions. This opinion of citizens, about the real democracy of elections is important because without it they will not be able to trust that the winners of elections, are worthy acceptance and trust as the executives of the legislative or executive state power or both in case of Russian president.

Of numerous studies it is revealed how authorities worked in Russia in the nineties and how critically citizens reacted to it, how low they judged the party politicians,

and how little the parliament, chosen in elections, was trusted. Before we present a closer look on the state of consciousness about democracy, its place in the hierarchy of values of Russian society and its imagination on the identity of democracy, we will study the political context in which the consciousness evolved.

Russian society more often than not felt shocked with such events as military force used by the President against the parliament in October 1993, the questionable turnout in the referendum that approved the constitution in December of the same year, and shortly after, the criminal privatisation performed by politicians who considered themselves as democrats and this is how they were called by citizens. The compromising privatisation was not only an infamous characteristic of the people that conducted it or were politically or administratively responsible for it, but also of the liberal-democratic values themselves, democratic institutions, and the idea of democracy. All the events have had a considerable influence on the perception of democracy by Russians.

When in 1991, a vast majority of society linked great expectations with democracy and freedom, after the shocks raised in the name of democracy, there was this first confusion concerning the core of democracy, later moral indignation, and finally, increasingly common opinions that democracy is not valuable as a collection of regulations how to rule a country and a method to do it, if so much evil can be done being a democrat.

The next shock is the crisis of insolvency of the state in August 1998, which was followed by the discredit of neoliberal economical thought and its followers⁴¹. It should be reminded that liberal reformers of the neoliberal theory must have known that such radical reforms that reward a few and worsen the fate of majority (at least for a few years, if not forever) "...in practice can be introduced only by an «autonomous» government which does not depend on its electorate for a short term and uses the support of international financial institutions"⁴². To put it differently, the neoliberal doctrine of a shock, fast and radical change assumes openly that the reform must take place during suspension of democratic procedures, since if the majority, in agreement with the rules of democracy, was supposed to decide about this, it would most probably disapprove such a painful and, as it appears, very risky system operation. Consequently, the shock entrance onto the market by mass privatisation of property was intentionally supposed to happen against the rules of democracy, and only after a possible success of market-property reforms the market was supposed

⁴¹ A. Yakovlev, *Interaction of Interest Groups and Their Impact on Economic Reform in Contemporary Russia*, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa Bremen, Arbeitspapiere und Materialien, nr 51, November 2003, s. 28.

⁴² A. Yakovlev, *ibidem*, s. 6.

to consolidate in economy with democracy in politics. The delay in real and deep democratisation was thus successful as the necessary political price of a shock therapy. However, there was a shock without an economic therapy, since until 2006 Russia did not return to the national income level of 1991. The political price (limitation or caricature of democracy) and the social price had to be paid by Russian society, and the benefits of competitive and efficient economy became available mainly for the few wealthy ones, and of course, to the very rich oligarchy.

In Russia, there arose a situation in which the President and his elite were able to paralyse opposition in the parliament and outside it by suspending democratic procedures or by their brutal violation. The market reform was not successful. It caused a crisis of uncompleted transformation or rather completed in a caricature form. Thus, it was possible for them to compromise two ideas – liberal democracy and market economy, since there appeared a bureaucratic democracy with all the pathologies and social costs imposed on the already impoverished society. The reformers planned to reach the market through democracy, but it appeared that both the way and the goal came with serious flaws and construction defects. As a result, neither nor the other function properly, as they should do as in the grown, evolving and improved by reforms capitalisms of the West. Therefore, Russian is a failed imitation of the Western models – which has happened before in the history of Russia – and it is not effective reception that gives results close to the previously assumed goals.

The intentions were certainly positive, but the strategy of their implementation had serious defects (e.g. it did not appreciate the value of market, legal and political institutions, being interested mostly in money, liberalisation of prices and privatisation), and the fulfilment of this strategy was even worse in the Russian authorship. The effect can be easily seen today. The economical and political instances of the result have already been analysed in the previous parts. Moreover, in the cultural sphere, in the world of values, norms and evaluations, they caused a real disaster – there appeared an axiologic, normative and institutional void *after the tripple act of destruction*.

The first act of destruction is rather a whole series of propaganda-educational actions in the communist system that destroyed or distorted norms and values that had survived the ages of czar absolutism. The switch from czar to communist censorship was rapid, since after a few years of relative freedom of thought and word, in 1922 already, Russia had a new, even stricter censorship. When perestroika once again opened the chances of nearly entirely free debate on politics, the second act of destruction begun; a fast deconstruction of the norms and official ideology of the USSR, very decayed and little attractive, anyway.

Then, the second act proceeded – an ideological offensive of Russian and foreign liberals completed the mission of deconstruction of Lenin axiology and destroyed political institutions that constituted the practical effect of this doctrine: censorship,

the communist party and its all-piercing apparatus, for a short time it even dissolved the KGB. The world of values and norms was in majority filled with neoliberal vision of wonderful market and the perfectly working democracy. And if the values, after debates and improvements, in some more pragmatic and less doctrineous variations, could consolidate, there would be no axiologic and institutional void. Unfortunately, in a very short time, the ideas of the market, private property and liberal democracy, before they begun to take root in more numerous social groups, apart from a part of the intelligentsia in big cities, experienced the shock of discredit instead of being an inspiration of shock therapy, and later of consolidation of democracy.

The discredit of the liberal-democratic values was the third act of destruction and it was largely the newly born followers of this ideological faith that destroyed it. After the three acts of destruction, the normative-axiologic void was frighteningly deep and vast. There were no pure and socially attractive values, and perhaps this is why the search turned to something better known – the Russian idea and redefinition of the national interest of Russia, some new versions of Eurasianism, and of course, the thought of rebirth of “*vielika dierzhava*”.

Election for Duma in 1995 and presidential ones in 1996, with their numerous pathologies, deepened the discrediting effects of the three levels of privatisation. As one of the famous theoreticians of liberal democracy, Stephen Holmes, wrote with critical passion, “...elections in Russia in reality do not create power. More accurately, they reflect the power that already exists... People’s cynicism as to “democracy” is perfectly understandable: if the state is too weak to execute its own rules, what sense is then in looking for a share in the legislative power”⁴³. A state, if too weak to defend the law, cannot lead to liberal constitutionalism, which is a contract mutually positive for both the majority and the minority. Social contract in contemporary Russia can be described as “replacing irresponsible authorities with tax-free wealth” and it is only an agreement among elites, and in Russia, “the privileged do not so much exploit, oppress, or rule the majority, as they simply ignore it”⁴⁴.

Private property is poorly legitimised, since the majority think that it should not exist in the sector of extensive industry, in the sphere of mining natural resources or education. And democracy is often perceived by citizens of Russia not as an institutional form of freedom, but rather as a guarantee of social safety and material wealth, or even as instance of treason of national interests. This surprising incoherence of

⁴³ S. Holmes, *What Russia Teaches Us Now?*, “The American Prospect”, 1977, vol. 8, no. 33, p. 11, www.prospect.org/print/V8/33/holmes-s.html

⁴⁴ S. Holmes, *op.cit.*, p. 13. in this beautifully written essay, Holmes encourages to redistribute property, to limit lack of justice, since “liberalism never aims at destruction of classes, yet to a class compromise”. As it seems, there were few liberals like him in Russia in the nineties.

views must be a legacy of the past. Neil Munro, analysing the data from 2005, proved that it is the heritage of values from the past that gives the strongest explanation of Russian views on the hypothetical restoration of the USSR, and not the effects of the new system or generation gap and the connected personal experience⁴⁵.

First, we will analyse the negative associations linked to the term of democracy. In 2005, only 26% of adult Russians believed that democracy is a universal value and can be used independently of social circumstances or cultural heritage of the past. Simultaneously, 42% of respondents claimed that the ones that in Russia consider themselves as democrats are “enemies of our country” that threaten the interests of the nation.⁴⁶ Society is alienated from the state and political parties, and it has considerable difficulties with defining the identity of its ideal orientation. In the same study, to the question: “to which three options – the left, the right, or the nationalist – they could count themselves”, as many as 60% of respondents were unable to specify their identity. No wonder that parliamentary and presidential elections are easy to manipulate, and decisions of a lot of voters are directed rather to the persons of famous leaders than to the ideological aims of party programmes.

Lack of faith in democracy, and perception of democrats as traitors of national interests corresponds with very high respect paid to themselves. Of Stalin as a leader of the country in the past. American researchers have trice (January 2003, June 2004, July 2005) done opinion polls in Russia, in order to establish the change and durability of support for Stalin and they named their results as “the Stalin test”⁴⁷.

At the beginning of the twenty first century, over 50 years after Stalin’s death, nearly one fifth of adult citizens were ready to vote for Stalin if he ran in the next presidential election, and about 40% of respondents said that they would certainly not vote for Stalin. It is worth underlining that in 2003 only 13% were ready to vote for Stalin, and in 2005 the percentage rose to over 19% of respondents. Among the younger participants of the study, only 50% decidedly rejected the possibility to vote for Stalin, which is a little better result in the whole representative group. However, the difference is very little, and the youth does not seem clearly less immersed in the nostalgia for Stalin than other age groups. It is not a positive factor for the consolidation of democratic institutions and values in Russia.

⁴⁵ N. Munro, *Russia’s Persistent Communist Legacy: Nostalgia, reaction and Reactionary Expectations*, Centre for Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, SPP 409, 2005.

⁴⁶ Data from research by WTsIOM quoted after D. Polikanov, *A Question of Value*, „Russia Profile”, 2005, of 19 September, www.russiaprofile.org/politics/article

⁴⁷ S.E. Mendelson, T.P. Gerber, *Die Russen und ihr Diktator: Stalin-Test nicht bestanden*, „Europäische Rundschau”, 2006, no. 2, p. 93–99. Translation from „Foreign Affairs”, February 2006.

Among the respondents there were few ideologically convinced Stalinists, only 12%, but it is worrying that there were even less devoted anti-Stalinists. The view of Stalin was surprisingly positive, e.g. 51% considered Stalin a wise leader 39% were of the opposite opinion, 56% claimed that he had done more good than evil, and only 28% said that the victory in the Second World War was not thanks to Stalin. At the same time, which contradicts the previous evaluations, as many as 70% admitted that Stalin had murdered or caused death of millions of innocent people. Only 16% denied the crimes of Stalin⁴⁸. In spite of the de-Stalinist campaign in the media and academic writings since 1989, it is surprising how high is the level of nostalgia for Stalin as a strong leader, even if accompanied by the consciousness of millions of victims of his policy. Perhaps it suggests that the high number of victims and authoritarian method of rule are not perceived as evil, but as necessary means of achieving success by the top leader. If he can achieve what people want (e.g. military power or fast development of industry), he can be forgiven for his lack of respect for life and dignity of people.

The opinion poll of 2005, conducted by Levada Centre, brought an interesting result. The respondents were given a set of institutions and values to specify which ones they associate with the idea of democracy. As important features of democracy 51% of the respondents claimed legal and social equality, and over 41% were of an even more egalitarian view, since they believed that democracy should not allow for large inequalities between the rich and the poor⁴⁹. However, this social idea of democracy has more followers, which can be explained as a result of the workings of the USSR system and its ideology.

The second group of the chosen ones associated with democracy the following rules and political institutions:

- multi-party system – 32%;
- political rights and freedoms of citizens – 29%;
- citizens' election rights and their participation in ruling – 28%;
- the rule of power division and of people's rules – 24%;
- regional and local authority independent of central authority – 18%;
- protection of minority rights against the power supported by majority – 13%.

Only 7% of the respondents associated democracy with the system in which rule the ones supported by majority.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, pp. 95–96.

⁴⁹ M. Bubbe, E. Beckmann, *Russische Demokratie – ein Gegenwertsbild*, „Russlandanalysen“ 2005, no. 60, p. 2–18. The authors work in the Moscow Office of Friedrich Ebert Fund.

The third group of respondents associated democracy with some features of an economic system:

- private property and freedom of business – 21%;
- social control over important natural resources – 10%.

This area of institutions and values associated with democracy has specific peculiarities and differs from similar cultural-sociological analyses in countries of stable and long-lasting democracies. They are only quantitative differences in a strictly political sphere (the second set of answers). Whereas the fundamental difference is the considerably egalitarian and social manner of understanding democracy, one which does not exist to such extent in the old, stable democracies of the West.

To the question “whether already today in Russia there is a democratic society”, the answers of respondents were as follows:

- not yet, but it is being formed – 41%;
- it will not be formed in the nearest future – 21%;
- it is difficult to say – 12%.

The majority is optimistic and of the opinion that transformation towards democracy is in progress. This optimism is specific in its basis, since to the question of who/what is first of all the guarantee of democracy in Russia, the respondents (2 268 people) answered:

- the President – 63,9%;
- political parties – 27,7%;
- the federal government – 26,9%;
- the media – 21,5%;
- the courts and militia – 14,8%;
- deputies for Duma – 14,2%;
- governors – 13,1%;
- social organisations – 9,0%;
- mayors – 7,4%;
- members of the Federation Council – 6,6%;
- responsible state authorities – 6,4%;
- large business – 4,8%.

Once more, the special role of the President is revealed – *it is him for nearly two thirds of respondents is the most important guarantee* of the existence or forming of the democracy. This hierarchy of positions below the President shows democratic hopes are ascribed to particular institutions. After the President, on a similar level there are political parties and the federal government and a little lower – the media. It is nothing strange on the comparable background. Even the strikingly low expectations connected with big finances are not surprising, since in most democratic countries few citizens believe that large money are guarantees of democracy.

In such an axiologic space, the legitimising power of presidency of Putin is extraordinary. It is a substitute of questionable or weak legitimacy of other basic institutions of the state authority and of institutions that protect private property. Similarly, the improvement of economic situation and social wealth adds to his high evaluations.

Even the neoimperial tendencies in foreign policy and an attempt to fulfil national interests in Russia seem to be an attractive element of his image⁵⁰.

In January 2005, a representative group of Russians was asked in a poll whether the future of their motherland is more connected with Western Europe or with the Commonwealth of Independent States. The answers were as following – in the CIS 69% of respondents saw the future of Russia, including 23% decidedly for the CIS. Only 31% saw the future of their country with Western Europe, including only 5% decidedly for the West. Therefore, a vast majority did not believe in successful europeanisation of Russia and deepening its presence in the world of the West.

It is especially interesting in the context of an answer to the question – can Russia in the future regain the position of a superpower, since only 8% of respondents thought it is very probable, 31% – possible, and 42% – rather improbable, and as many as 12% – totally impossible. In the same study, only 4% identified themselves as Europeans, and 65% as Russians, 18% as people of local identity, and 9% as people more of the USSR than Russians⁵¹.

The introvert attitudes and some provincialism of Russian mentality encourages a realist vision of their place in the world, which does not mean that Russians do not want to be proud of their motherland and their achievements, as well as of their leaders. An illustration of this desire is the personal authority and social prestige of President Putin. Moreover, Putin, contrary to Yeltsin, is a president who created his charisma himself and sustains it, and who successfully refers to national and religious traditions to consolidate social support for his rule.

⁵⁰ Comp. M. Kaczmarek, *Rosja na rozdrożu. Polityka zagraniczna Władimira Putina*, Wydawnictwo Sprawy Polityczne, Warszawa 2006.

⁵¹ The research was conducted by the Technical Centre of Levada for a team of Scottish researchers led by R. Rose. Full report from the research R. Rose, N. Munro, *How Russians View Their World?*, University of Aberdeen 2005.

ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN CREATION OF THE BASES OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER LEGITIMACY

Such an extraordinary position of the President in the general pattern of legitimacy of Russian state evokes the question to which extent it is a real popularity and social support, and to which extent it is a fake product of the media and of relevant information policy of the President himself and his administration. The record of Putin's popularity is so surprising that at the end of his second term, none of French, American, or German presidents in a similar point of their careers can be considered equal.

Numerous researchers of Russian media have noticed a considerable difference between the scope of political control over the media in the time of Yeltsin's and Putin's presidency. There is a shared opinion that Yeltsin and his circles had no control over the media, which supposedly added to a fast moral wear of the image of the President. President Putin, on the other hand, by depriving Gusinsky and Byerezovsky of their ownership of NTV television, as well as of numerous popular printed media, increased political control of the state in this sector, and without formal restoration of censorship, he is able to manipulate the ones that create his public image. This view seems to suggest that President Putin's trust has been largely created in an artificial way, and that he is not such a legitimising model as it would appear in sociological research.

This view is real up to some limits. It is true, of course, that the private capital of Russian oligarchy in the media market has been weakened by Putin. However, it is not true that Yeltsin did not want or try to manipulate the media to improve his image, that he was understanding and liberal to what was said or written about him in the media.

During the presidency of Yeltsin, similarly, in spite of the general chaos confused sometimes with freedom of thought and speech, there were tools in the hand of the President that allowed him to influence the media. His administration withdrew the newspaper "Rossyskye Vesti" in Moscow and in eleven other cities. It was an official press organ of the President's office that was simply not an organ of promulgation of the new law. It was neither an interesting nor often read newspaper, and basing on it, it would be difficult to create the image of the President in wide social circles. It was mainly read by state officials. Since December 1993, in the administration of the President, a specific tribunal appeared that tried conflicts arising on the background of news published in the media. It consisted of eight people, including four lawyers and four journalists. The existence of these institutions shows that the President wanted to have some influence on the media, and that he was not tolerant for the critics of his actions. Not all journalists could get passes to the Kremlin to

report on official events with the presence of the President and his highly promoted supporters. In the end of 1994, a lot of journalists that wrote critically about Barsukov, who was responsible for the safety of the President and the Kremlin, lost their passes as a punishment and some of them were given the passes back in January 1995⁵².

Newspapers were also closed for publications not in accordance with the expectations of President Yeltsin⁵³. Censorship was introduced once again in the time of state of emergency after the “shooting of the parliament”, and later it was kept in a form of auto-censorship, mainly in the radio and television⁵⁴. The privatisation in the sphere of the media described before, gave control over them to clans of oligarchy that supported the President, which especially violently deformed the information that reached society, especially during the presidential campaign before the second term of Yeltsin’s office. The bias of the media was probably in 1995 and 1996 the most extensive in the whole period of Yeltsin’s presidency.

Writing about the years 1992–1993, J. M. Waller rightly claims that it was a period of drastic limitations in the freedom of the media by threatening journalists by safety services, by arresting them and their journalist materials that referred to Chechen War, finally, by tolerating murders of journalists by unknown perpetrators⁵⁵.

Nevertheless, the above and other ways did not save the image of Yeltsin, and he was not the base of legitimacy of the whole political system, unlike his successor. Thus, other factors, apart from the manipulation of the media, were stronger in specifying the legitimacy power of the President.

President Putin continued, what is more, he formalised some manipulant practices of his predecessor, e.g. since 15th March 2000, an act on the mass media and fight with terrorism has been in force, which forbids publication of interviews and direct statements of Chechen terrorists. Amendments to this act of December 2001, made it possible to define as a crime even an interview with the legal President of Chechenia, A. Maskhadov, reports on corruption among Russian officers in Chechenia, or complaints on the disastrous living conditions in camps for refugees from Chechenia.

⁵² E. Huskey, op.cit., p. 82.

⁵³ J. Lester, *Modern Tsars and Princes: The Struggle for Hegemony in Russia*, Verso, London 1995, pp. 71–73.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 73.

⁵⁵ J.M. Waller, op.cit., p. 12. during the first decade after 1991, over 2000 journalists died in the area of Russian Commonwealth, and the case of A. Politkovska in 2006 is only another one in this tragic line of death in fight for freedom of publishing. Nothing indicates that this phenomenon should soon disappear. Comp. J. Rogozha, *The end of Free Media Era in Russia?*, “OSW News”, of the 5th April 2001; R. F. Starr, *Towards a Police State?*, “Polska w Europie”, 2001, no. 36.

The methods of the state apparatus pressure on the media are greatly varied: threatening too critical publishers with a withdrawal of concession or with blocking bank accounts, introduction of censorship ad hoc, explained by protection of state secret or in the name of national safety, monitoring of the internet, radio and satellite stations, rewarding journalists loyal to the authorities and numerous other forms of corrupting the individuals that influence public opinion⁵⁶.

Both Russian Presidents were characterised by a manipulant attitude towards the media, yet as it could be assumed, President Putin is simply more successful in his actions to build his image in the media. Moreover, it is not possible to reasonably blame the Presidents personally for all instances of limiting the freedom of the media. Financial oligarchy enjoys a considerable influence on the media, as well as organised criminality groups that use illegal ways of pressure.

However, despite the manipulations, there are still very critical movements in the press (e.g. "Novaya Gazeta", or "Argumenty i Fakty") and on the internet. Public television is the most loyal to the state apparatus, as well as central radio stations of federal reach. The fall in the circulation of daily press and information weeklies also proves the falling demand for printed word, which additionally lessens the circle of widely informed people. The quality of Russian weeklies aimed at the reading elite is high and the reliability of information is comparable to European standards.

According to the research performed by ROMIR-Monitoring, over 50% of Russian citizens claimed in 2005 that there is a freedom of speech in their country, but 80% of the asked journalists did not agree with this opinion⁵⁷. What is more, most citizens, tired and morally indignant with some abuses of freedom of speech in the media, considered it desired to restore prevention censorship in some spheres of information, with which over 60% (so few!) of journalists did not agree⁵⁸. As illustrated, expectations concerning freedom of the media and of speech in Russian society are not high and it is not too difficult to fulfil them.

Was it then when the media that constructed the legitimising power of President Putin? We must return now to the question. Putin's popularity can be only to a little extent owed to political technologies and to control of the media. Putin's legitimacy seems not to be artificial, somewhat virtual, after all, since then also other, at least some, centres of state power would have higher social acceptance and trust for

⁵⁶ More on the practices at the time of Putin's presidency comp. O. Panfilov, *Putin and the Press: The Revival of Soviet-style Propaganda*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London 2005.

⁵⁷ Data from ROMIR report from "Izvestiya" of the 7th April 2005.

⁵⁸ W.L. Entin, *Svoboda SMI v Rossyi: yubiley biez torzhestva*, "Rossia v globalnoy politiki" 2005, no. 3, quoted from www.globalaffairs.ru/printver/4168.html. The one who regularly reads Russian media is now certainly not bored and has a chance to understand the problems of the country and ways of solving them.

political institutions connected with the elite of the authorities would generally be better. There would not be such a big distance between trust for the President and trust for the Prime Minister and Federal Government, which is a presidential government, not parliamentary one. If so, it indicates that President Putin has got personal characteristics that reflect the expectations of most citizens of Russia, which also makes it easier for them to accept his policy and its social results.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Russian President has got high trust (Putin after 2002) or low trust (Yeltsin during most of his office). It is not an inborn characteristic of the institution of presidency, though its position in the system of the state and in political tradition (by easily noticed analogy with the position of a czar or a secretary general) is so high that it could encourage to a high level of respect.
2. The level of trust to presidency as an institution should be analysed separately from the level of trust to the person of a specific president in a specific moment or in a longer period of time bearing in mind his personal features, style of leadership and the effects of his rule accredited to him by society. This personal factor has a decisive meaning: personalisation of power as a part of a super-presidential system correlates positively with the personal character of trust that the President gets from his citizens.
3. Therefore, the difference between the two Russian Presidents is that Yeltsin had in the beginning high trust and he lost it, and Putin was not widely known and not many trusted him (because he was from the Kremlin elite of Yeltsin) in the beginning, and later he was able to build his extraordinary position, one in which the socially supported by 70-75% of citizens authority connects with the institutional prestige of the President's office.
4. The legitimising function of President Putin for the whole political system is thus high, and he is a kind of substitute of the low trust for other political institutions. However, personal trust for President Yeltsin was so low that he could not play such a part. On the contrary, artificial propaganda actions were necessary to justify his authority longer than the strongly frustrated and ashamed society allowed him to exercise it.
5. This difference between the institutional and personal trust, as well as between the two Presidents, reveals important characteristics of political culture of Russian society. It is *a society in which personal relations are still more important than impersonal political or legal institutions*. This is why society transforms their attitude towards the President into an imagined personal relation (as if everybody

knew him in person) and finds it difficult to notice his purely institutional role specified in the constitution and other legal acts. For this reason, juridication of political relations transforms in Russia into systematic institutionalisation of public authority with such a difficulty.

6. The phenomenon of partial or unfinished institutionalisation of the supreme authority can therefore last for a very long time and it does not necessarily has to indicate the end of the democratisation process. It prolongs the process and hinders the consolidation of democracy, it adds to comebacks of autocratism, which by the power of inertia, can last in Russia for a long time to come. The strength of continuity of tradition in culture is greater than the power of the groups that desire democratic modernisation of Russia.
7. From the legitimacy perspective, it is very difficult to answer the question whether superpresidentialism gives Russia a chance for successful, yet long-lasting democratisation, or if it will degenerate into a form of authoritarian power or a dictatorship. To answer the question, it is necessary to step above the data on political culture and legitimising strategies, which is not the aim of the article.