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## Political Reforms in Russia and Improvement of Political System in Russia at Beginning XXI Century

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*In article historical evolution of the Russian reforms, their sociopolitical maintenance are considered, underlined specificity of the Russian reforming, internal and external factors are defined influencing character of transformations.*

*Keywords: reforms, social and political transformation, political course of reforming, Russia and West, model of overtaking development.*

**Point:** In the Russian historical political tradition in conducting reforms under the inertia and passivity of the broad masses, the subjective factor plays an important role. Under these conditions, the leading position belongs to the role of a public leader. The fact is particularly relevant to Russia with its centuries-old monarchist, fuehrer historical traditions. In the early twenty-first century, such a leader by a lucky chance for Russia became V.V. Putin. Was appearance of Vladimir Putin as head of state a random occurrence? It was random to a large extent. And at the same time, it was natural. After ten years of destruction of the country in the 1990s, the emergence of a creative statesman, which was Vladimir Putin for Russia, was ripe. Here was a clear dialectic of the necessary and the accidental in a historical process.

The political component of the reform process is extremely urgent. The success of social and economic changes depends largely on the openness of the political system, maximum freedom of speech and other political freedoms, strict compliance with state laws and human rights. The more the political sphere is close to the democratic ideal, the more favorable are the conditions for successful economic and social transformation.

**Example:** In the political sphere, same as in the economy, a substantial burden of unresolved issues accumulated during the 1990s. As a result of spontaneous, often not thoughtful and hasty decisions Russia appeared on the verge of collapse as a sovereign state formation. The most important strategic task of the new state leadership was to preserve the unity of the country. To achieve this, it was necessary to

build a strong public authority, to strengthen its structure from top to bottom.

The priorities of the new leadership in the political sphere were to strengthen the vertical of state power through a series of fundamental political decisions: seven federal districts were formed to enhance direct contacts of the supreme power with the regions. Presidential plenipotentiaries appointed to the districts began to exercise functions of political intermediaries between the supreme executive power and local authorities in the regions. Boundaries of federal districts coincided with the boundaries of military districts, and prominent political and military figures were appointed to head each of them. Five of the seven presidential envoys had military ranks of generals (G. Poltavchenko, V. Cherkesov, P. Latyshev, K. Pulikovskiy, and V. Kazantsev). Thus the President demonstrated the seriousness of his intentions to strengthen order in the country, to prevent the trends of collapse and chaos.

Another important measure to strengthen the state was reorganization of the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Federal Assembly. Previously, its members were representatives of regional political elite from the structures of the legislative and executive authorities. Emphasis was placed on their work in the field, in the regions, as the work in the Federation Council distracted regional leaders from everyday practical work with people in the community. In their place, rank and file representatives of local legislative and executive authorities were nominated (although, on presentation of executive and legislative structures of the regional government). Thus the President reduced possible influence of the regional leaders on the political processes in the center; put their work under tight control of the central executive power.

A kind of compromise between central and regional structures became the creation of the

the State Council, an advisory body with unclear political functions. It was assumed that the State Council in Russia should give recommendations on the development of new laws. As is known, the State Council was established for the first time in 1810 by Emperor Alexander I, when the State Council also had no real power functions. The State Council of 2000 was meeting not more than once in three months. In the period between the sessions, the presidium of seven governors was meeting, whose composition was constantly changing.

Changes in the structures of the highest legislative power were designed, first, to increase the personal authority of President Vladimir Putin as a determined, principled, consistent politician who had the strategic initiative to reform higher state bodies, and secondly, to put regional leaders under control, many of which, in the situation of lack of proper control by the central government in the previous years, had lost the sense of responsibility not only to voters, but also to the Kremlin. Some of them were explicitly stated in their real place in the political system of the state authority.

Measures to bring regional legislation into line with the Constitution and federal laws served for strengthening of the state in the country. It's no secret that in the 1990s, many regions of Russia, especially the national republics defending the centrifugal tendencies adopted their own laws that were contradicting with the federal laws. This fact destabilized the political situation in regions, encouraged ethnic separatism, threatened the existence of a single state space and the territorial integrity of the country. Through the efforts of the center it became possible to reverse this negative trend and weaken the political position of a number of regional leaders seeking to use the lack of control by the center in their own short-term interests using the Yeltsin's ill-conceived thesis

in early 1990s – “take sovereignty as much as you can”.

During Vladimir Putin’s presidency, in connection with the continuation of market reforms and the overall disappointing results of the socio-economic development in 2000, a model of managed democracy began to develop. Its content was determined by the authors of the scientific collected articles “Competitiveness and Modernization of the Economy” as “a formal observance of democratic norms under the actual tyranny of power.” (Competitiveness and economy modernization, 2004. – P.35) The power found its justification in the drive for strengthening the state’s role in the society, overcoming its weakness, improvement of public activism through state mechanisms. However, in the system of managed democracy the society loses the ability to control activities of the government.

In practice, overcoming the weakness of the state turned out with restrictions on freedom of speech, increasing use of the so-called administrative resource in election campaigns, the abolition of gubernatorial election, the onset of the socio-economic rights of workers (monetization of benefits, increasing payment of utility bills, etc.). At the same time, the political powers of the presidency expanded steadily, strengthening the power vertical. In the official literature, this phenomenon was called “managed democracy.”

The model of managed state (democracy) appeared in connection with the subject’s inability to organize management of the community under the conditions of deepening democratic principles and norms. Historically, Russia has not developed a model of social functioning of subsystems in democracy, which in the 1990s was reduced to formal, external features. The authoritarian tendencies of the new government narrowed the format of democracy even more leaving the latter

in the form of individual elements, especially after the tragic events in Beslan in September 2004.

We understand this situation not as absolute immunity of Russia to democracy, but as a lack of adequate social experience of functioning of a social system in the atmosphere of democracy, its real content but not of a substitute with formal features. The forms of democracy, of course, can be different in different political systems based on historical and other traditions, but the content of democracy in its foundations and principles is one-dimensional. In this regard, we agree with E.G. Yassin that “managed democracy ... means that in reality the state is subject to the bureaucracy ...”, which naturally limits the boundaries of democracy, negates the efforts to build a civil society. (Yasin, 2004. P.17).

Democracy is not government of the people, if understand literally the content of this term. It just cannot be that people rule the state. “Democracy is a certain technology acquisition and implementation of a minority government with the help of majority, relying on majority, but not always in the interests and to the benefit of the majority”, writes A.D. Kerimov. (Kerimov, 2007, P.26). Democracy involves the creation of such an atmosphere in the community, under which even the most insignificant voice, opinion can not only be heard by the authorities but also taken into consideration.

Democracy in its full expression serves as an essential attribute of a successful organic socio-economic transformation, as it provides openness, transparency, respect for human rights and freedoms, equality of all citizens before the law. Democracy unleashes creative energy of the people guided to the track of creation of new social relations.

The Russian leadership of the early 2000s had a difficult choice: to strengthen the democratic tendencies of the 1990s, fill them up

with real, concrete substance and by solving this problem to bring the socio-economic reforms to the needs of society; or to continue the Russian tradition of the feudal order of power for the power itself through manipulation of the law, upholding the interests of bureaucracy. Putting forward the thesis of “managed democracy” to stake on authoritarianism, concentration of state power beyond the democratic space. The second trend became dominant. Thus, the Russian state government continued to follow the Byzantine tradition rooted back to the medieval Russia, which consisted in the implementation of the thesis that the power in all its forms and manifestations is above the law.

A retreat from democratic principles of public management inevitably increased the level of lack of freedom in the society, closeness of the power to control of the citizens and criticism of the government. In the absence of alternative projects, concepts and opinions authoritarianism, political monopoly intensified, which significantly reduced the efficiency of conducted socio-economic transformation. The economic laws, under which the market develops and operates, were substituted with non-economic, administrative methods of management; there appeared signs of the administrative-command system incompatible with market reforms. The reforms themselves lost momentum, as they were based not on the objective reality but on the minds of government officials who provided and oversaw the reforms.

Interesting data, which indicated a lack of socio-political and economic experience of functioning of the Russian society in democracy, were received during a survey by VCIOM. 26 % of Russians believed that democracy was a “universal value”, 42 % thought democracy was “harmful to the state”. 44 % of respondents valued stability in the society most of all, while 37 % – the law (Kostikov, 2006, P.8). The movement of

the Russian power in the direction of managed democracy under such circumstances was fully justified from the perspective of majority of the society.

At the initial stage of reforms the state reform could be considered a success. In this case, it was not about the effectiveness of government agencies. First of all, the strategic problem was solved of preventing the growth of centrifugal tendencies that led to the disintegration of a unified Russian state. Further, nomination and decision of a critical strategic political objective followed to achieve a higher degree of efficiency of government agencies at all levels within the framework of reforming the political system of society, development of public policy that can bring the country out of the social catastrophe, overcome the accumulated destructive tendencies in the society.

However, the first steps to strengthen the state were limited to external forms not leading to radical changes in the state’s role in the society that, in turn could lead to significant positive changes in the economy addressing the main strategic objective of improving the standard of living of the population. There still was no clear strategy of the state development, an integrated program of bringing the country out of the economic and social crisis. This applied to a scientifically developed theory for the transition period, a state stabilization program – a political strategy based on the actual socio-economic conditions of Russia’s revival. The exception in this respect was the fundamental scientific study “Economics of transition period: Essays on economic policy in post-communist Russia. 1991-1997” (Moscow: Institute for Economy in Transition, 1998), performed under the supervision of E.T. Gaidar.

The remaining reasonable, correct theses put forward by leaders of the state – the need to strengthen the family, the fight against child homelessness and neglect, the formation of

conditions for healthy living, the solution of pressing demographic problems, etc. – did not receive reinforcement from the organizational and financial point of view, sank down into talking by officials. It did not give any significant socio-economic effect in solution of problems put forward by the state leadership.

One of the ways of strengthening the state taken by Vladimir Putin was the introduction to the state structures of representatives of the uniformed services – the Army, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Federal Security Service (Arinin, 2012, P. 7-33). The idea was that the security forces will be able to restore order in the field, to strengthen discipline, to stabilize the socio-economic conditions for giving new impetus to the reforms. This was done through democratic means, through elections using the administrative resource by the candidates including support from the President himself.

In our opinion, it is impossible to assess this trend in political terms unambiguously. On the one hand, participation of representatives from law enforcement agencies in the structures of the state to some extent contributed to the strengthening of discipline, order, especially at the regional level. The *siloviki* were less involved into the games between local and central bureaucracies, less influenced by political parties and movements. On the other hand, representatives of law enforcement agencies did not have the appropriate managerial experience of regional management, which reduced the efficiency of their managing activities. The teams of engaged specialists were not always able to replace the first person. Some members of security departments promoted to the posts of regional managers could not resist the temptations of cooperation with business entities of a questionable character.

In December 2003, elections to the State Duma of the fourth convocation were held in Russia. Convincing victory in elections won

the pro-presidential “United Russia”, which received more than 37 % of the vote. In support of the “United Russia” a powerful administrative resource was called, which included, inter alia, the support of President Vladimir Putin.

The second place was taken by the Communist Party with a considerable loss of its earlier positions in the Duma, receiving 12.7 % of the vote. The reasons for the loss of majority of the Communist Party electorate are multifaceted. Among them is the outflow of a part of votes to the patriotic block “Rodina” (Motherland), the information blockade in the media, errors in the pre-election program guidelines that had lost relevance and topical meaning.

The third position in the Duma, unexpectedly for the most of professional political consultants, was taken by the Liberal Democratic Party – 11.6 %, which re-emerged from the political wilderness of the previous years. LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy was able to gather the protest electorate using well-defined slogans “We are for the poor, we are for the Russians” imbued with nationalistic spirit.

Unexpected results were shown by the fourth political force that entered the State Duma – the block “Motherland”, which within a short time gained a convincing victory due to the use of campaign slogans in support of the Russian people, the ideas of statehood and patriotism.

All of the political parties that entered the State Duma, with all existing political differences, were by content the parties, which to some extent defended the ideas of great power that became dominant for the Russian statehood.

Sensational was the crushing defeat at the Duma elections of the right-wing parties: SPS and the “Yabloko”, who could not overcome the 5 percent barrier. With the defeat at the election the right-wing parties lost their influence on the policy line of the state. The main reason for the defeat of the right forces became the detachment

of their political programs from the realities of life, the immediate needs of citizens and the tiredness of the population of liberal reforms.

As a result of the elections to the Duma a pro-presidential majority was formed in the parliament consisting of deputies, supporters and members of the “United Russia”, which made “united Russians” responsible for the legislative policy of the State Duma. At the same time, the loss of the State Duma opposition sentiments in relation to the executive government and its political decisions had negative consequences in terms of the need to adjust the state policy reforms. In such circumstances, the state lost the variety of shades of political and ideological spectrum of opinions from different sectors of the society.

On March 14, 2004 the presidential election was convincingly won by the acting Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was elected to a second presidential term. He received 71,22 % of the vote. His political opponents, Nikolai Kharitonov of the Communist Party got – 13,74 %, Sergei Glazyev – 4,11 %, Irina Hakamada – 3,85 %, Oleg Malyshkin from the Liberal Democratic Party – 2,03 %, Sergei Mironov of the Party of Life – 0,76 %. The overall attendance was 64,3 %. People who voted against all were 3,46 % of all voters (Izvestia, 2004, 16 March).

In the Voronezh Region, at the presidential election of March 14, 2004 Putin received 65,28 %, N. Kharitonov – 21,96 %, Glazyev – 3,37 %, Hakamada – 2,93 %, against all – 2,67 %, O. Malyshkin – 2,21 %, S. Mironov – 0,87 %. The election was attended by 62,5 % of Voronezh voters (Izvestia, 2004, 16 March)

The convincing victory of Vladimir Putin in the election indicated that the majority of voters continued to feed hopes for an adjustment of the political line, the vector of socio-economic reforms that could improve life of the working people of the Russian society. In addition, its

role was played by the absence of major political blunders of the state leadership in the period of 2000-2004. The global market situation was favorable too, which helped to replenish the state budget through exports of energy resources.

Putin’s election platform in 2004, like it was earlier, contained no specific promises; it was sufficiently vague and not adjacent to any of the ideological and party trends. This circumstance was an advantage as compared to other presidential candidates, whose ideological positions were closely tied to the political line of the specific parties and movements.

In this regard a substantial interest for this study is the issue of the nature of the Russian government at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the disclosure of its political content a response is rooted to the question of seriousness of the state to implement or continue the transformations that were begun. This contains the moral aspect of the problem and the question of the political role of its leaders.

It is traditionally believed that Putin and his entourage (although it is far from being uniform) express political interests of the center. A growing number of political parties, factions of the Duma gravitated to the political center. Political center provides the most stable position in the Russian society, the possibility of a political maneuver, finding compromises, overcoming conflicts, seeking for political allies, etc.

At the same time, the phenomenon of a political center is very complicated, multi-dimensional, especially in the periods of transition. The ideological platform of the Russian state was depicted in a rather elaborate formula of “conservative-centrist liberalism”, which claimed to unite the largest possible number of people, supporters of the implementation of the reform course. This term appeared in a British newspaper “Financial Times” in the middle of January 2004 and belonged to the new head of

the Russian President Administration Dmitry Medvedev.

Dmitry Medvedev summed up the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin. The main outcome was the achievement of political stability, which at the State Duma elections in December 2003 was legitimized by the Russian voters. This fact became very important to support the reform policy. The main direction of state policy of the Russian leader before the presidential elections in 2004 was identified by Dmitry Medvedev as creation of a competitive economy, new jobs, modernization of production facilities and reduction in poverty. These priorities formed the content of the conservative-centrist social-economic program of the state management (Izvestia, 2004, 21 January).

During Vladimir Putin's stay at the head of the state from March 2000 to March 2004, it became possible to stop gaining force of processes of the state degradation, destruction of law enforcement and other power agencies. The constitutional order was restored in the country; a new vertical of federal executive power was rebuilt. Trends appeared of constructive interaction between legislative and executive branches of government, the efficiency of legislative work of the Parliament improved. Common legal space of the country was restored. All these measures should be attributed to the absolute merits of the new Russian political elite.

However, the state leadership failed to fully remove the burden of accumulated political problems, to achieve more effective political decisions. One of the main reasons for this situation consisted of mixing phenomena in the analysis of causal links and relationships, when instead of the necessity to establish the cause and resolve conflicts arising in practice, the state struggled with resulting factors that were often of the second but not first order. Therefore, the structures of the state lacked an effective

mechanism for resolving socio-economic contradictions in the implementation of the state reform policy. Thus, in response to the call of the President of Russia to fight against one of the glaring negative manifestations of public life – juvenile neglect and homelessness – Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matvienko said that she personally would ride on the Moscow train stations and collect homeless children. But what to do next with these children? Deliver them to orphanages? This statement is a clear example of substitution of reasons with a result. Such examples are plentiful. In such approaches the problem, of course, could not be resolved. The matter is not in the number of open children's homes and strengthening of Russian family but in the organization of effective family support from the state. In this respect very little was done.

**Resume:** The terrible tragedy in Beslan in September 2004, which killed more than three hundred people – adults and children, became a watershed in the politics of Vladimir Putin, who took the course of strengthening the power vertical and gradual phasing out democratic processes in the country. In September 2004, gubernatorial elections were canceled. V.B. Pastukhov rightly believes that the changes in the political sphere since 2004 were associated not with the events in Beslan (they were just a cause) but with the “orange revolution” in Ukraine (Pastukhov, 2010, P.13). He calls a revision of democracy of the 1990s “counter-revolutionary coup d'état”, which led to the fact that real competition disappeared from the political life and the political system itself became closed. As a reaction of the power to the “orange revolution” in Kiev, the doctrine of “sovereign democracy” emerged primarily intended for external use only. In the same vein, V.B. Pastukhov considered the establishment of pro-Kremlin youth groups such as “Ours”, etc. to control the moods of the Russian youth.

In line with the problems of Russian reforms of the 2000s a question of the nature of the Russian state and the Russian national idea is justified. For the first time in the modern Russian history, this question was put forward by the Russian President Boris Yeltsin right after the 1996 presidential election. This thesis came out of the mouth of Boris Yeltsin, who was far from the national nature of the Russian government, quite unexpectedly and since then has been continually put forward in political debates by many experts – politicians, scientists, public figures. However, no significant positive solution to the complex ideological issues was achieved in the debates: the leaders either ignored the issue as unnecessary or brushed it aside as being unimportant. The issue of the national idea has not been raised into practice, which is quite surprising for a country that is a home to more than 160 different national groups.

However, the lack of a deep theoretical development of the problem, and all the more of a practical solution to the problem, creates difficulties for the efficient and effective national policy. Unresolved issues of the nationwide ideology create many difficulties and conflicts in the Russian society, hinder the reform political line.

The analysis of discussions around the topic of the all-Russian ideology has led us to the conclusion that this ideology must be based on historical and cultural traditions of the Russian people as a historically cementing ethnic group, around which other nations have been uniting for centuries, and the Russian state itself, Russia's moral and spiritual space were formed. The structure of the all-Russian ideology must include the appropriate spiritual and moral elements of the lifestyle and mentality of other peoples of Russia in the form of national ideas, traditions, customs, and ceremonies.

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## **Политические реформы в России и улучшение политической системы России в начале XXI века**

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*В данной статье рассматривается историческая эволюция реформ в России, их социополитическое обеспечение, описывается специфика проведения реформ в России, выявляются внутренние и внешние факторы, влияющие на характер преобразований.*

*Ключевые слова: реформы, социальные и политические преобразования, ход политических реформ, Россия и страны Запада, модель обгоняющего развития.*

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