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THE CHANGE OF RUSSIAN POLITICAL REGIME FROM THE “WHITE REVOLUTION” TO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (2012–2018)¹

The fall of the “White Revolution,” the mass demonstration against the forged presidential election in autumn and winter 2011/2012, was closely connected with the processes of ruling class evolution. Then, Dmitrij Miedwiediew’s coterie was substantially marginalized. In turn, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB, in Russian: Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации – ФСБ), which had played a crucial role in quelling political demonstrations and fragmentizing opposition, started to gain the increasing clout in the political regime. The next junctures were the decisions concerning the annexation of Crimea made in February 2014 and the beginning of the appropriation of the Donbass. They were desperate attempts by Kremlin to uphold the Russian sphere of influence in the so-called “near abroad” (Götz, 2017; Rywkin, 2015: 229; Rak, 2017d: 984). These decisions were to allow Russia to maintain its regional power (Forsberg, Pursiainen, 2017: 220; Gardner, 2016: 490). Nonetheless, not only did they start the degradation of Russia’s position in the international environment (including the state’s exclusion from the G8), but they also became significant factors in changing Russian political regime and contributed to the political structure’s alterations which were already underway.

The fall of the “White Revolution” was the first factor that affected the change of the contemporary Russian political regime (White, McAllister, 2016; Chaisty, Whitefield, 2013; Robertson, 2013; Bikbov, 2012). Noteworthy, this contentious event coincided with the end of Vladimir Putin’s third presidential term. The second factor, which emerged simultaneously to the first, was the dissolution of the pro-occidental technocrats who held influence in the Kremlin decision-making elites. The symbol of this dissolution process was the rejection of Skolkovo initiative as an alternative to Silicon Valley (Rowe, 2014; Kinossian, Morgan, 2014).

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This article fills in a gap in the specialist literature on Putin's Russia. Even though current studies describe Russian politics and identify some of the features of Putin's political regime (Greene, Robertson, 2017: 1802; Slinko et al., 2017: 26; Umland, 2017: 465; Mendras, 2017: 1489; Gel'man, 2015; Tafel, 2014), there is no analysis that sheds light on the essential features of the system after the "White Revolution." Russian political regime after this mass mobilization is understudied whereas this caesura is significant for our understanding of the changes of the political system and the current structural dynamics in contemporary Russian public discourse.

METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE RESEARCH

As mentioned, the article covers the gap in the specialist literature. It aims to detect changes of the Russian political regime after the fall of the "White Revolution" and to account for why and how the system changed over time. So, the article strives to make a methodological, theoretical, and empirical contribution to the field of study on the dynamics of non-democratic regimes, and especially the nature of the alterations within Putin's Russia (Petroni, 2011; Bogaards, 2009; Mirskii, 2003; Zaslavsky, 2003). The research field is the Russian political system which is determined by its three aspects: structure of political institutions, political awareness of public issues, and political mobilization during Putin's third term. The research makes use of qualitative analysis of sources and draws upon the critical analysis of the recent news. It applies Roman Bäcker's analytical device in the form of a model that consists of the three continua whose extreme points are the indicators of authoritarianism and totalitarianism respectively in order to capture the essential features of Putin's political system. According to this model, bureaucracy or siloviki, emotional mentality, and mass apathy are typical of authoritarianism. In turn, state-party apparatus, totalitarian gnosis, and controlled mass mobilization are the essential symptoms of totalitarianism (Bäcker, 2011: 72). This paper scrutinizes how Russian political regime evolved from the "White Revolution" to the beginning of Putin's fourth term. It tests the hypothesis that the system most likely evolved from a soft to hard military authoritarianism which then moved towards a hybrid regime. The hybrid regime might have been made of the elements of authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

STATE-PARTY APPARATUS

This part of the article concentrates on Russian state-party apparatus. The reconfiguration of the so-called Kremlin-towers decision elite structure in 2012–2014 brought about the enhancement of the power structures such as the FSB, the military-industrial complex and the reduction of the role of the Ministry of the Interior (e.g., Rossgwardia creation) in the decision-making authority. Thus, the remaining institutional pressure groups began to play a considerably smaller role in the political structure than they used to have in the past (Епифанова, 2012; Епифанова, 2014). The beginning of the

conflict with Ukraine in February 2014 prolonged military operations in the Donbass (Bukkvoll, 2016: 267; Davies, 2016: 726). Additionally, then, the military intervention in Syria further increased the role of the power structures, and more broadly the military-industrial complex in the state (Kozhanov, 2014). Due to the mixed nature of Russian participation in the Donbass fighting, such as the large role of informal institutions and activities in the formation of political party fighting squads from volunteers, and participation of military troops the role and the scope of activities of the secret political police (the FSB) increased significantly.

The alteration of the policy towards the non-systemic opposition resulted in the further increase of the FSB's role in Russia. Therefore, the mass demonstrations in Moscow in 2011–2012, combined with the morally motivated systemic delegitimization greatly contributed to the growth of the political systems instability (Lankina, Skovoroda, 2017: 270; Oleinik, 2013: 77; Koesel, Bunce, 2012: 403). For the purpose of removing this menace, the decision-making elite had to extend the intensity of the processes of marginalization of the political opposition. This then led to the increase of repression, surveillance, and preventive measures. Thereby, the role of the FSB and other institutions geared towards stabilizing political order by means of state control expanded substantially. The escalating role of police structures was also a consequence of the strategy of increasing the level of loyalty of the bureaucratic state apparatus towards the decision-making center. One of the mechanisms of this strategy was the selective repression of the very high officers of this apparatus. As a result of the repression, the judges handed down prison sentences on the basis of corruption allegations. In November 2012, Anatoly Serdyukov's close associate was arrested on the charge of corruption. Then, Serdyukov was dismissed from the function of the Minister of Defense of Russia. The decision on the deposal of the first civil defense minister was considered the military sector's victory (Anatoly Serdyukov, 2012). The next indicators of this tendency were the arrest of Governor Nikita Bielykh in 2016 (Reuters Staff, 2016) and the sentencing of the Minister of Economic Development Alexei Ulyukaev in 2017 (Walker, 2017). Each of these cases can be explained in relation to the specific circumstances: the first of these concerns conflicts in the Kirov governorate (oblast's), and in the second, the intentional action of Rosneft President Igor Sechin is to be considered. Nevertheless, in each of them, the role of police structures, including the FSB, was vital. Furthermore, the substantial growth of repressiveness against the senior officials of the state apparatus has become glaringly apparent.

Let us move towards approaching the question if the bureaucratic-military apparatus transformed into a totalitarian party-state apparatus in Putin's Russia. This question can be answered through the analysis of the two processes. The first is the institutionalization of the subordination of the broadly understood sphere of social organizations, including other political parties, to the Kremlin. The second one is the scope of the formation and advocacy of the political party fighting squads.

Note should be taken, the activities of the All Russia People's Front (in Russian: *Общероссийский народный фронт*) also contributed to the change of Russian political regime. This organization was established in 2011 to unite all the pro-system social organizations, i.e., associations of entrepreneurs, trade unions, veterans' organizations,

youth and women's associations. The major task of the All Russia People's Front was, however, to propose the candidates of United Russia (in Russian: Единая Россия, tr. Yedinaya Rossiya) in the elections to the Duma (Reuter, 2017: 107–158). However, until 2013, this Front was active to a relatively low extent. After registering and changing its name in 2014, there were no significant press releases about the front's activity. For the most part, the All Russia People's Front's candidates started from United Russia's list, or, being formally independent candidates, were institutionally associated with this party during the term of office (Malle, 2016: 200). Through the system of assigning tasks and supervising high-ranking civil servants, this organization became an institution forcing total compliance with Putin (Stanovaya, 2016). Thus, the president could dramatically increase its power to the typical position of a totalitarian leader (Ehret, 2007: 1236). Nevertheless, there is no evidence of any activism of the All Russia People's Front officers except for rare meetings with President Putin. Putin's proponents did not consider this organization a career path in the political system. It was much easier to them to pursue a career path in the political structure within the already existing vertical mobility paths.

Russia's political party fighting squads cannot be equated with the groups of contract killers serving in Chechen armed forces. The last ones fairly resemble the Latin American or Filipino "death squads" which are the armed state formations employing terror as a means to evade the menaces to the ruling elite. Indeed, such tactics were rarely used in Russia. However, let us remind the most known cases were the murders of Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 (Roudakova, 2009: 412) and Boris Nemtsov in 2015 (Lipman, 2016: 341) which indicate that the tactics were in use.

In Russia, the political party fighting squads include two major organizations: the National Liberation Movement (NLM; in Russian: Национально-освободительное движение) and the SERB (South East Radical Block) movement. The former headed by Jewgienij Aleksiejewicz Fiodorow is an organization not seeking to get a legal status. Fiodorow is a member of the Duma and at the same time a member of the Political Council of United Russia (Центральный штаб НОД, 2018). The NLM has its official website, gives the personal composition of its management and presents its program whose key slogan is the belief that Russia is a US colony since 1991. The leaders of the NLM deny journalistic reports concerning the participation of the organization's activists in the attacks on the oppositionists, and independent social enterprises that are not approved by the ruling party (Сурначева, 2014; Юдина, Альперович, 2016).

While the NLM activity is ideologically motivated by imperial anti-Western ideas and has patrons in the party sphere (mainly United Russia), SERB is of a slightly different nature. The Russian Liberation Movement SERB, formerly called the South-East Radical Block, was created in order to fight in Ukraine with the so-called Euromaidan. At the end of summer 2014, the activists of this group left Ukraine and, under the slogan of not admitting to Euromaidan in Russia, they dealt with combating the opposition mainly by attacking oppositionists (including covering with green caustic substance, breaking cultural projects, lawsuits, participating in trials, etc.) (Loshkariov, Sushentsov, 2016: 71). The police had to initiate investigations, but their superiors did not want perpetrators to be sentenced. Even if the proceedings against SERB activists were initiated, they were rapidly invalidated because the SERB was under the tutelage

of the officer of the Center for the Interior Ministry’s Anti-Extremism Center, Major Alexei Okornu (БЫВШИЙ АКТИВИСТ SERB, 2017; Анастасия Михайлова, 2017).

The lively activity and the type of political party fighting squads influence the nature of Russian political regime. Due to the diverse reactions of oppositionists and independent journalists (from strengthening Alexei Navalny’s will to fight to Julia Łatyninoj’s decision to emigrate), it is very difficult to determine the level of effectiveness coming from the political party fighting squads’ tactics of intimidation. Undoubtedly, these fighting squads are not of mass character, and thus, although they strengthen the level of political conformism, they are not able to interact in the same ways as mass political protests do for example. Thus, the party fighting squads were not used in 2017 during mass protests organized by Alexei Navalny.

The role and dominance of the military complex and political police structures in the state have been clearer since 2014. This is a general observation that does not reflect the complexity of the relationships between the very diverse functional, territorial, and institutional political forces within the apparatus of the Russian Federation. However, the conclusion resulting from this domination is quite obvious, i.e., during Putin’s third term, military authoritarianism was a dominant type of the political regime (Rochlitz, 2015: 59; White, 2018: 130). The existing few, and marginal structures typical of the party-state apparatus do not change the above general conclusion.

BETWEEN EMOTIONAL POLITICAL MENTALITY AND POLITICAL GNOSIS

This part of the article deals with political awareness in contemporary Russia by locating it on the continuum determined by emotional political mentality and political gnosis. Studying political awareness may cause difficulties to the students of Russian political regime because of the co-existence of four Russias in spatial terms, as discussed by Natalia Zubarewicz and her co-workers (Зубаревич, 2010; 2003; Липский, 2014; Zubarewicz, Horbowski, 2014). An undoubted fact is the very high level of acceptance in relation to Putin’s post as president. The level of acceptance and trust in politicians who perform public functions in democratic states exceeds the norm. By 2014, more than 75 percent of the populace, and especially after the annexation of Crimea, showed up high levels of acceptance. Between March 2014 and June 2015, these levels fluctuated between 80 and 89 percent, before going down between 84 and 81 percent from February 2017 to November 2017 (Levada-Center, 2017; Nardelli, Rankin, Arnett, 2015; Smyth, 2014). Such a high level of acceptance stemmed from many reasons, especially effective efforts of specialists in creating the public image, efficient performance of the role of a strong and determined leader overseeing his subordinates, skillfully upholding the myth of “the good tsar punishing bad officials” and many others. Since 2014, the image of a “strong leader” has been supplemented by the myth of the savior of the enslaved nations (Rak, 2017b), the creator of the great superpower Russia regaining its position in the world, and a determined leader effectively fighting the enemies (Hutcheson, Petersson, 2016: 1108; Tempest, 2016: 101; Bäcker, 2011). However, the figure of Mega-Anthropos typical of totalitarian political gnosis

(Rak, 2017c) appears very rarely and is socially marginalized (Клип «Мой Путин», 2018).

Regardless of the popularity of the positive Stalin myth, the image of the current president is more convergent with the myth of the tsar than of being the successor of Lenin (Tismaneanu, 2016: 744). It should be stressed, however, that it does not follow a high level of personal legitimacy. This type of theoretical category cannot be used to describe the current political structure because of the personal non-empowerment of the president's function.

One more question ought to be addressed here, namely, to what extent is the splitting (also called black-and-white thinking or all-or-nothing thinking) common in Russian society, and does this create a contrast by creating distinctions between the "we" and the "they"? (Bäcker, 2007; Rak, 2017b)? Yuri Levada Analytical Center's research done in 2016 indicates that 80 percent of Russians are convinced that Russia has enemies. Moreover, 75 percent of them consider the broadly understood West as the major enemy. Such a high level of perception of the world in black and white categories, i.e., the good and the bad, coincides with the influence of mass media (Levada-Center, 2016) in shaping public opinion. A small percentage of Russians claimed that the television was their sole source of information on public matters, which in Russia, regardless of the form of ownership is completely subordinated to the Kremlin (Babayan, 2017; Bäcker, 2015: 105–112), except for the niche and exclusive programs available on the Internet TV channel Dozhd.

Since 2012, with the increase in the range of repressive measures against the non-state forms of civic organization, a change has been noticed in the language used for public statements. Then, new words appeared and some others from the old days returned to the public discourse. The extent of the intensity of this phenomenon went up after February 2014 with the (re)introduction of some terms, e.g., *inostrannyje agienty* (foreign spies). There were also the words like the fifth column, traitors of the nation and *nieželatielnyje* (undesirable) organizations (Павлова, 2014) etc.

Although these terms appeared for the first time in many years during Putin's March speech to the National Assembly in connection with the irredentist "Return of Crimea to the Homeland," these words ceased to appear from the autumn of 2014 (Ambrosio, 2016; Teper, 2016; Rak, 2017a). These only re-appeared in the exceptional cases such as in the statements made by president Ramzan Kadyrov in 2016, where he suggested that the enemies of the nation should undergo psychiatric treatment (Meduza, 2016).

The derogatory vocabulary was used to describe Ukrainians, in particular, Ukrainian politicians who did not submit to the Kremlin. The negative emotions attached to this vocabulary and the concepts behind these words derived from the lexicon of World War II which entered the public discourse throughout that period (Pasitselska, 2017). The contextual analysis of the word "ukrfascist," which was commonly used in the central Russian press, indicates that it is treated as an insult with no semantic field. It was a classic label employed to confound the object of the utterance.

As the result of the very high level of aversion to Ukraine and its treatment by many Russians as a hostile state, the level of disapproval alongside the negative stereotypes, functions in feeding back into the negativity surrounding the issues. These elements of the Russian political discourse are the manifestation of totalitarian gnosis. Let us

conclude that after the fall of the “White Revolution” political awareness was largely typical of the fundamentalist way of thinking with the minor elements of totalitarian gnosis.

THE PUBLIC BETWEEN THE MASS APATHY AND CONTROLLED MOBILIZATION

This part of the paper discusses the activities of the public by locating Russia on the continuum whose extreme points are mass apathy and controlled mobilization. The capacity of the state apparatus and the activating potential of the ruling party to organize controlled political mobilization in contemporary Russia was relatively low. Demonstrations and other contentious performances staged by United Russia, even with the use of administrative resources, were not usually numerous. Additionally, the turnout of the manifestations of support for the annexation of Crimea was relatively small (“Crimea is ours” (Suslov, 2014)).

There are, however, two significant exceptions. The first of these is the anniversary of the end of World War II, the only anniversary that is massively celebrated. Participation in this celebration originates from free will rather than from a forced or controlled form of participation. The end of the Great Patriotic War (in Russian: Великая Отечественная война) on May 9, 1945, is the only historical event accepted by all political groups and ideological currents in Russia. On the one hand, the event serves as the confirmation of the Kremlin’s superpower position. On the other, it also marks the end of the huge hecatomb of the people living in the Soviet Union. The second exception is the mass gathering which almost covers the entire population inhabiting Chechnya. This republic is significantly different from other regions of Russia, and also belongs to a different type of political regime. Chechnya can be found, also due to the significant level of meeting other criteria (Hughes, Sasse, 2016), a totalitarian political entity.

In turn, the results of the elections to the State Duma in 2016 indicate a reverse process, especially with regard to Russian capitals. Turnouts in Moscow and St. Petersburg did not exceed 40 percent (Выборы, 2016; see: Винокуров, 2017). Regardless of refraining from falsifying results, one of the reasons for such a low turnout may be related to apathy in regard to voting and the election process. It is an essential feature of the policy of the authoritarian decision-making elite that is afraid of the undesirable forms of political activity of the social masses, especially during their transformation into a proto-civic society.

In 2012–2018, the Russian society was much closer to the ideal type of social apathy than to its antinomy in the form of the controlled and mass social mobilization. Although the attempts to increase the level of the mobilization characteristic to totalitarianism occurred since March 2014, they were discontinued after a few months.

Let us emphasize that mass political protests took place in Russia in March, June, September, and November 2017 (Light, 2017). Though, for the first time, they covered not only all the Russian cities with more than a million inhabitants but also a significant part of the regions’ capitals and smaller towns. Participation in them was almost ex-

clusively limited to the young generation (15–25 years old people). The consequence of the emergence of this type of mass political protests was the Kremlin's decision-making strategy of increasing the level of political apathy among the social groups that would be most willing to participate in the protests.

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The analysis shows that Russian political regime is a hard military authoritarianism. It evolved from a soft to hard military authoritarianism and then towards a hybrid regime made of the elements of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. After the beginning of the conflict with Ukraine, few totalitarian components were visible. They occurred especially in the sphere of political awareness in the form of totalitarian political gnosis. In addition, the indicators of totalitarianism started to disappear from September 2014, except for the totalitarian political gnosis in the political discourse. The political party fighting squads typical of totalitarianism functioned incessantly.

Just after the beginning of the war with Ukraine (from February to the summer months of 2014), the aspirations to build the totalitarian political gnosis into the political discourse, as well as the attempts to incur mass mobilization, were clearly visible. Importantly, these were considerably reduced since autumn 2014. The started intervention in Syria might have been one of the reasons for this tendency. However, the lack of a significant social endorsement of the totalitarian political discourse and mass mobilization shaped the political regime. A large part of Russians, mainly ethnic, did not accept totalitarian institutions, language, and social behavior. It does not mean, however, that these components of the political regime did not exist.

The very high level of the declared political conformism with the simultaneously increasing axiological, personal, and system de-legitimization as well as depletion of other resources of the ruling elite prompt a question concerning the level of stability of the political system. Thus, the research indicates that Russia's hard military authoritarianism (with the uncommon elements of soft totalitarianism) is declining.

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ABSTRACT

How did Russian political regime change after the “White Revolution”? The article makes a methodological, theoretical, and empirical contribution to the field of studies on the dynamics of non-democratic regimes, and especially the nature of the alterations within Putin’s Russia. The research field is the Russian political system determined by its three aspects: structure of political institutions, political awareness of public issues, and political mobilization between the “White Revolution” and the beginning of Putin’s fourth term. The paper solves the research problems by employing the qualitative analysis of sources and drawing on the critical analysis of the recent news. The analysis benefits from the use of Roman Bäcker’s analytical device, a theoretical framework made of the three continua whose extreme points are the indicators of authoritarianism and totalitarianism respectively. The research tool is to identify the essential features of Putin’s political regime. According to this model, bureaucracy or siloviki, emotional mentality, and social apathy are typical of authoritarianism. In turn, state-party apparatus, totalitarian gnosis, and controlled mass mobilization are the symptoms of totalitarianism. This article researches how the Russian political regime evolved from the “White Revolution” to the beginning of Putin’s fourth term. It tests the hypothesis that the system most likely evolved from a soft to hard military authoritarianism. The regime might have moved towards a hybrid regime made of the elements of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. It formulates the conclusion the Russian political regime is a hard military authoritarianism. After the fall of the “White Revo-

lution", most notably after the annexation of Crimea, few totalitarian elements were visible, mostly in the sphere of social awareness in the form of totalitarian political gnosis. In addition, the indicators of totalitarianism started to disappear from September 2014, especially the elements of totalitarian gnosis in the political discourse.

Keywords: political regime, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, Putin's Russia

ZMIANA ROSYJSKIEGO REŻIMU POLITYCZNEGO OD „BIAŁEJ REWOLUCJI” DO WYBORÓW PREZYDENCKICH (2012–2018)

STRESZCZENIE

Jaka była istota zmian reżimu politycznego w Rosji po „Białej rewolucji”? Nowatorskie rozwiązanie powyższego problemu badawczego wzbogaca metodologiczne, teoretyczne i empiryczne płaszczyzny badań nad dynamiką przemian reżimów niedemokratycznych, a szczególnie Rosji Putina. Polem badawczym jest system polityczny Rosji analizowany na trzech płaszczyznach: struktury instytucji politycznych, świadomości politycznej oraz aktywności społecznej na continuum pomiędzy sterowaną mobilizacją a apatią. Cezurami są: „Biała Rewolucja” oraz wybory prezydenckie w 2018 roku. Problem badawczy został rozwiązany dzięki jakościowej analizie źródeł i krytycznej analizie informacji. Badanie było możliwe dzięki zastosowaniu siatki kategorii teoretycznych autorstwa Romana Bäckera. Stworzył on trzy *continua*, których punkty ekstremalne są jednocześnie istotnościowymi kryteriami odpowiednio autorytaryzmu i totalitaryzmu. To narzędzie badawcze pozwala na określenie nie tylko miejsca, ale i wektora oraz wielkości zmian reżimu politycznego Rosji. Zgodnie z tym modelem panowanie biurokracji i/lub „silovikow”, mentalność emocjonalna i apatia społeczna są cechami typowymi dla autorytaryzmu. Z drugiej strony panowanie aparatu partyjno-państwowego, gnoza polityczna i sterowana masowa mobilizacja są symptomami totalitaryzmu. Wykazano, że reżim polityczny w Rosji przekształcił się z miękkiego autorytaryzmu w twardy i militarny. Jednocześnie zaczął on mieć charakter hybrydalny, a więc łączył elementy autorytaryzmu i totalitaryzmu. Po upadku „Białej Rewolucji”, a szczególnie po aneksji Krymu, wyraźnie widoczne były elementy reżimu totalitarnego, zwłaszcza w sferze świadomości społecznej. Jednakże elementy totalitaryzmu, w szczególności w sferze dyskursu publicznego zaczęły zanikać po wrześniu 2014 roku. Od marca 2017, wraz z pierwszymi masowymi demonstracjami politycznymi, rosyjski reżim polityczny zaczął wykazywać cechy schyłkowe.

Słowa kluczowe: reżim polityczny, autorytaryzm, totalitaryzm, Rosja Putina

