

The conservation of the political regime: Yet another failure of modernisation

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The pressing issue of the economic modernisation of Russia is impeded by the political system of Russia which rejects all the attempts to modernise it. The existing contradiction has resulted from the process of the formation of market institutions and mechanisms under the conditions of absence of political culture of democracy. The interests of the political and bureaucratic elite are poorly compatible with democratic institutions. The political circles simulate democratic reforms by way of creating institutional simulacra which are a semblance of public participation in making decisions and an oversight of their implementation and, in reality, are not supported by appropriate channels and mechanisms to perform the functions. The situation is clearly visible on the regional level, which reveals the attempts of the authorities to achieve economic efficiency by optimising bureaucratic structures and organising surrogate forms of public activity.

Nowadays, there is no need to justify and ground the recognition that no modernisation is possible in

Russia without reforming its political system. It is recognised by scholars, analysts, and politicians. However, the paradox and dramatic character of the situation is that the issue of the modernisation is not consistent with the structure of the Russian political system which, institutionally and procedurally, accords only with the regime concentrating all processes on the vertical of the executive authority and is, for the time being, successfully rejecting all attempts to modernise it. The constructive peculiarity of the system is “that it focuses on maintaining the status-quo (distributing economic assets and power resources, first of all) and is not aimed at the modernisation development” [2].

In 2008, acknowledging the regional policy pursued in the Russian Federation unsatisfactory the State represented by the president and the government declared they had adopted a new strategy meeting the ‘requirements of the reality’. As President Putin said, “it requires a modern system of regional planning which should avoid any excessive regulation from the federal authority” [6]. Such an approach should have been based on the strategies advanced by the regions themselves with the participation of a wide circle of persons and structures taking decisions and creating a political field, within which they would have established political alliances and looked for compromises

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and which would have encompassed the State, business, public organisations, the court, and the press as the fourth branch of power. However, the expectations the new strategy made one entertain contradicted the features peculiar to Putin's political regime, under which the regions, in fact, have lost their status of political subjects. In order to solve the tasks of economic development of the regions, the State habitually set in motion the executive echelon of power and virtually eliminated all the above mentioned actors from the ranks of the subjects making decisions. Eventually the State turned out to be the only gamer on the political field. All regional authority bodies and departments became functional extensions of the federal administrative machine beginning with the plenipotentiary representative of the President and ending with the administrations of the municipal districts.

Speaking before the Federal Assembly in 2008, the then president Dmitry Medvedev clearly pointed to the interrelation between the economic modernisation and the political one and he emphasised that the former could not be achieved without the latter. In 2010, in his material *Our Democracy Is Not Perfect and We Are Aware of It. But We Go Forward* published on the president's website, he made an objective assessment of the development of the Russian political system and focused his special attention on the symptoms of stagnation and the danger that stability would transform into a factor of stagnation. Mr. Medvedev stressed that the principle task for Russia was to make the representation of the people more pronounced, so that “the political majority was not merely static and the ruling party had both rights and obligations without being only an appendage to the executive power [...] The political system must be so structured that the opinions of each social group including the smallest ones should be clearly heard, and, ideally, even the voice of one person should be heard” [3].

Although he clearly expressed the thought that Russia needed a political modernisation, Mr. Medvedev could not cross the boundaries of the system that had been established before his presidency. “A consequence of the ‘modernisation without policy’ is the system, in which the domineering bureaucracy is almost entirely independent from the institutions of public policy” [4].

It is quite understandable that the roots of the problem lie in the peculiarities of the Russian transitional period: the transition to a market economy and democratic political regime occurred in circumstances when there were no economic, political and social structures complying with the requirements of the new

system, which caused the inability of the Russian society to influence on the choice of the country's course of development. The choice was made by a narrow circle of State officials who had clearly specified interests of their own, who possessed a management experience and had an access to resources. The privatisation of the State property secured them a lifetime ‘administrative annuity’ and it was on the base of that appropriation that today's political class of Russia was formed [1]. The existence of this class is not compatible with the democratic political process implying that wide circles of interested organisations and persons are involved into the mechanism of making and implementing decisions and, in such a way, acquire the qualities of political subjects. The openness, transparency, and deliberativeness accompanying the democratisation of the process of political participation undermine the conditions that enable the political bureaucracy to control monopolistically the State resources, which makes the sources of its wealth uncontrolled by the society. The political modernisation is a real threat not only to the wellbeing of the bureaucratic elite but also to its very existence.

The effort to prevent a real democratic process has determined the imitation model of the Russian democracy basing on poor capacity of constitutional institutions as well as on establishing structures which duplicate their functions under the supervision of the executive power all over the so-called “verticality”. Mr. Putin's coming to power put an end to the period of spontaneous democracy under Boris Yeltsin's presidency. The political regime stabilised and the dual nature of the Russian State established itself on all the levels of the economic and political systems. According a certain researcher, the political actors “did not follow the structures and rules that ensured the framework for order, but adapted the structures and rules to their own objectives and, at the same time, they created new ones which supported the regime and concurrently circumvented the formal constitutional order” [7].

The Russian society, which, for seventy years, existed in circumstances of the discordance between the proclaimed principles of the organisation and distribution of power functions and the actual practice of the Soviet State clearly having it introduced into the mass consciousness, up to the present has been unable to realise that the democratic mechanisms and processes have been substituted by simulations. The simulations radically changing the meaning of democracy discredit the idea and conceal the selfish aims of the ruling elite. The lack of alternative has become a

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