

## SECTION II: RUSSIA'S AND ETHNIC MINORITY STUDIES

### **Transformation of the Russian society and the role of elites during social changes**

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Where Russia is going? In the course of full-scale social changes and radical reforms in Russia the question becomes more and more actual among politicians and researchers. This sacramental question is important for citizens of Russia. Obviously, there is an observed necessity of reconsideration, after the disorder in the USSR and Gorbachev's "reconstruction" of basic bases and principles of the transformed society with accompanying liberalization and democratization. Millions of Russian citizens were asked the questions: "What happens in Russia? Who, on what basis and in whose interests redistributes the authority and property? How do the positions of different groups vary? What changes should be expected in the nearest and the long-term future?" In the opinion of a Russian researcher I. K. Pantina, in the public discourses: "Russian way", "Russian idea," the Russian project, "Russian self-determination", etc. the aspiration of various public forces to understand the basic vector of historical movement in Russia today and in the nearest future has been seen (Pantin, 1999, p. 38).

Modern Russia obviously unites incompatible characteristics: crisis and stabilization. Slow development of Russia (a cliché discourse in descriptive schemes) subjects to the durability of all elements of social structure of a society. Russia does not only live during an epoch of dramatic transformative changes, but also more closely approaches its existential boundaries. Extending mythological consciousness generates various myths from the futuristic prosperity of Russia and calls of the Western democracy up to threatening of "the hostile forces" to the whole society. Power structures have tried to offer the program of mobilization and use of public resources to the Russian society, concentrating simultaneously on them in a format of "statehood". Authoritativeness of Eltcin regime (1993-99) with its actual domination of oligarchic circles and political elites is delegated towards the Putin's authoritative regime (2000-2008) with its rigid orientation on vertical echelons of power and

irreconcilable struggle against economic and political elites. The perception of fundamental novelty of transformed Russian society can be characterized, as it is thought, as follows. The period of “the Russian transit” (distracting from its methodological and metaphorical congestion) has been completed in general. Institutionalization of post-communistic transformation in Russia has served the national elections (qualifying attribute of the Russian democratization), and institutionalized actors mobilizing “the mobilized Russian electorate“(R. Rose) - the Russian political elites (Rose and Munro, 2002).

The second electoral cycle in Russia, which included the elections of deputies to the State Duma on 19 December, 1999 and the presidential elections in Russia, when V. Putin was elected as a president on 26 March, 2000, has finished the process of “constituent elections“, that started during reorganization (elections of 1989-1991) and the first electoral cycle of 1993-1996. The termination of the second electoral cycle in Russia, in turn, means an end to the process of transformation of a political regime in Russia, which passed a transition period as a transit from one political regime to another. The given passed transition from one condition to “another“ has come to an end with creation of new social institutes (frequently not so rational and socially significant), and a combination of certain institutes that possess supplementary features. Therefore, the process of transition and folding of a new political regime with necessity causes a distinct conceptual and empirical substantiation of the whole transformation of the society.

Furthermore, in Russia there was new social stratification inherent with the destroyed and newly created public groups and their mutual relations. In current and in foreseeable prospect the given social structure will substantially neutralize any significant social changes. Russian society has reached a condition of relative stability with unmarked parameters of this stabilization. Russia’s power elite does not possess a necessary extent of strategy for the given stability. Russian society represents a certain balance between uncertainty and fragmentations; and the needed social defragmentation is improbable in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, the fragmentation and uncertainty also act as mortgage of stability from the position of distribution of powerful attitudes in the society.

A response to the methodological disorder and conceptual inability to understand the processes of transformation in Russia was the creation of an independent Interdisciplinary academic centre of social sciences (Intercenter) in Moscow. The centre was set up under the direction of a

professor of Manchester University Teodora Shanin and an academican of the Russian Academy of Science of Tatyana Zaslavskoj. One of its major problems was the assistance to formation of “invisible college “of scientists investigating fundamental laws of post-communist transformation of Russia. Having concentrated on the discussion of fundamental developments in Russia, creative collective “Intercenter” has come to a conclusion that in 1993 Russia was at “a point of uncertainty“ which easily allowed to open trajectories of social development towards different ways (Shanin, 1994, p.317).

In the long-time surveys of Intercenter, which resulted in the work of international symposiums under the characteristic name: “Where Russia is going?”, a change in the developed situation of transformation in Russia in the period of 1995-1998-2000 has been fixed. Transformation of institutes of authority and property, defining societal type of a society, has got irreversible character; the spectrum of alternatives of the further development was essentially narrowed. Analyzing the period of regime change by 2000, the attitude of ruling elites with subelites and social groups, power and society, the preservation of a phenomenon of uncertainty was ascertained both in the process of transformation and its outcomes. The condition of transformational uncertainty involves a high degree of risk of personalization of the power structures (Krasnov, 2006) and paternalistic attitudes. As O'Donnell marked, in the conditions of political uncertainty, “the character of attitudes of executive authorities can easily be transformed into clientelism and a personification and usurpation of power (O'Donnell, 1996, p.36).

As a result of discussions, scientists have come to a conclusion that Russians have not gained more freedom; their political rights have a little extended, the social and economic rights have essentially narrowed (Zaslavskaja, 1994-98, 2000, 2002). This conclusion closely brings us to the statement of a problem about the major actors of transformation process. The problem formulated in a consequence, has been formed as follows: “Who and where aspires to conduct Russia?“ (Zaslavskaja, 2000). The design of an incongruous combination: crisis and stability as specific conditions of the Russian society leads to a rather specific conclusion. The former one-dimensional characteristics of social development are not applicable and the previous scales of measurement and standards normative-valuable development do not work any more. From the point of view of sociological interpretations (based, in particular, on Jury Levada and his colleagues' materials) the Russian society is in conditions of active

and purposeful self-destruction, at actual domination of informal, shadow attitudes and without any legal practice as a subject of transformation. The given multilevel economic way was adequately constructed and stabilized. In the coordinate system of political sociology in the Russian society, “a person” and “people” as subjects of former public attitudes, have changed almost unrecognizably, having lost their active-subject qualities. However, the crisis condition of social stratification does not move to the destruction of society. The social protest does not involve energy of a radical public reorganization. Interpretations of a similar condition of a society are quite various: from arguing on the decrease of “the mission” of Russian nation to a known phrase of publicist J. Korjakina: “Russia, you became crazy“. Therefore, in Russian expert and politologist community, the accent on the analysis of comparative efficiency and probability of alternative ways, strategy and scenarios of transformation process in Russia, are put into the agenda.

On the other hand, the crisis of dominating authority does not change or liberalize a society as a whole. Carrying out their own variations of development, the Russian society actively borrows and introduces foreign experience and globalistic tendencies in their bright “hybrid” form. The approach to transformation of the Russian society as to the process of testing significant influence of external factors in connection with the increased openness of Russia in relation to other countries, strengthening its dependence on global processes – a distinctive feature of a modern political regime in Russia. A multivariate character of transformation process, presence inconsistent innovative structures and institutes, the close interrelation of the changes occurred in economic, political, legal and social subsystems of a society legally does accent on a dialogue of various sciences called to conceptualize the societal changes. Occurring discussions about the originality of Russian society (Ahiezer, 1994, pp. 3-25; Gorin, 2002) and its transformation do not stop to this day both among wide public circles, and in the scientific and expert Russian and foreign community (Gill, 2002).

As Jadov believes, the dominating point of view among the Russian sociology consists that “any classical sociological theory cannot be adequate in relation to research of social problems and processes of the modern world”, including Russia, which processes of modernization cannot be understood outside of universal process (Jadov, 1993, p.38).

In terms and a methodological key of the theory of modernization in Russian sociological and politological ideas are analyzed processes of

transformation in Russia, especially in a range of change of political regimes of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> electoral cycles. A number of authors has qualified the occurring changes in Russia as late, catching up modernization (Krasilshchikov and others, 1993).

A general research position is the belief that modernization was personified first of all in a ruling class, and sociocultural “cleavage” and the variants of its interpretation by various social groups pushed the authority to use its administrative-authoritative means (Naumova, 1994). Dominating description in the Russian scientific literature and the analysis of processes of transformation within a paradigm of modernization and adjoining to it of a different sort of transitional concepts prevailing in the West-European literature, possess certain cognitive opportunities (The contribution to an attempt to comprehend features of a today's stage of development of Russia was brought by the Russian researchers V.A.Volkonsky, B.G.Kapustin, I.M.Kljamkin, N.V.Naumov, A.I.Neklessa, A.S.Panarin, I.K.Pantin, V.O.Rukavishnikov, V.V.Sogrin, V.G.Fedotova).

In Russian literature, from the point of view of modernization, the problems of “transit” of the post-communist countries were originally considered by N. Naumova (Naumova, 1994). Based on the research done by the Western authors about the experience of modernizational programs in the third world countries, she has allocated the following conditions necessary for successful modernization: (a) sufficiency of economic and human resources; (b) the civil consent among elites of a society; (c) deduction by the state of the control over occurring transformations and anticipation of sharp social conflicts and armed conflicts; (d) fast growth of middle class and (e) presence of national mobilization idea. Arising doubts towards the theory of modernization consist in difficulty of adequate empirical acknowledgement.

An American political scientist and sovietologist S. Cohen approves, that the objective estimation of changes occurring in Russia can be more likely made from a position of demodernization (Cohen, 1998.Sept.7/14; Cohen 1998, pp. 241-250). Studying Russia, insists Cohen, it is necessary to address to a fundamental problem of continuity and changes (Cohen. 1998, pp. 31-32). The position towards the theory of modernization and its use on a field of the Russian tranzitological reality is expressed clearly and correctly by S. Eisenstadt. He considered that each country, each society is included into universal social process with their own unique way which

since the middle of 60ies until nowadays closely investigates specificity - institutional, cultural and other modernizational processes. Modernization according to Eisenstadt, has not led to occurrence of a uniform civilization or to universal institutional sample; on the contrary, development of different modern civilizations or, at least, civilizational models (patterns), i.e. civilizations with some general features, but possessing the tendency to development of different processes of transformations of their social institutes (institutional dynamics) takes place (Eisenstadt, 1963,1973).

An analysis of the post-soviet transformation in comparative perspective becomes prevailing in Russian science at the beginning of 2000. Theories and methodologies of modernization gradually concede to the concepts of democratic transits. At the same time, positioning of concepts of democratic transits (or transitions) on a field transformational processes in Russia encounters serious methodological difficulties (mostly, in terms of applicability). Western political scientists are of the opinion that Russia and other post-soviet societies are on the other side of the standard vision about “transitions to democracy“ and the standard categories which are used for the analysis of transitions in the East Europe in the post-USSR do not operate (Solnick, 1999). Undertaken attempts of operating at the analysis of post-communist transformation by categories of type “a hybrid regime” (Gelman, 1999) or “delegate democracy“(Melvil, 1999) and other “democracy with adjectives” (Collier, 1999) do not give the effective results. Therefore, in the first half of 1990ies the problem of compatibility of concepts applying for universality with a post-communist reality became a subject of sharp polemic (Schmitter, 1994). From here correctness and legitimacy of studying of transitions from authoritative regime to other type of a social system is linked with consideration of democratic perspective or within the theory of democratization. Arguing the necessity of “democratic perspective of democratic transition” (Gelman, 2000, p. 9) and uniqueness of the each national cases, Guillermo O'Donnel and Phillip Schmitter introduced the concept about the open ending of democratic transits (O'Donnel and Schmitter, 1986). As a consequence, the difficulties and lack of quick success about political development of modern Russia among researchers sometimes resulted in a vision of failures of democratization as such (Shevtsova, 2004, p. 36).

The majority of theorists of “transitions to democracy“ consider the criterion of democracy as a replacement of the governmental posts through free and fair elections. The authors of the concept of transitions (for example, Huntington, 1991; Schmitter, Karl, 1991) obviously or implicitly are guided

by one of two conceptual schemes: 1) “competitive elitism“ in terms of Schumpeter in which the single criterion of democracy is a replacement of the governmental posts through free and fair elections (Schumpeter, 1995, p.335); 2) pluralistic model of “polyarchy” in terms of R. Dahl in which the main measurements of a political regime are “competitiveness” and “participation” (Dahl, 1971), and the basic indicators of democracy - a set of the civil and political rights and freedom. However, in case of Russia, out of eight listed indicators of the rights and freedom (according Dahl) not more than about half only operate to some extent, and the results of “fair elections”, even at the presence of competition, in many respects depend on administrative mobilization by the ruling class. In addition, there is a regular inequality of conditions and in fact, lack of the electoral competitiveness. A set of ways are provided for the operating carrier of “the supreme authority“- a re-election under any circumstances and not an assumption of change of authority in case of an undesirable candidate’s victory. It is possible to ascertain, that mass political participation in Russia contributes a little. As Gelman notes, in the post-soviet space there is no significant group of citizens that is independent from the authority, mostly economically; therefore in the former USSR the behaviour of mass still, for a long time, will first of all reflect processes at the level of political elites (Gelman, 2001, p.15-30).

As a whole, recognition of the models of democratization not keeping within the Russian case, or the non-completeness of the Russian transition with an obvious deadlock ending as a reaction to the failure of implementing a model of democratization to analyze the Russian case, does not seem convincing (Lipman, 2004, p.11). Melvil's assumption on the fundamental ambiguity related to the results of the Russian transformation looks more fruitful: whether there was “a Russian choice”, and if yes, in favor of which political system, and in case it has not occurred, what the present transitional condition is? (Melvil, 2003, pp.161-164). Then, what can the open ending of transformation in the context of studying transitions mean?

According to A. Przeworski, during the transformation “depending on the purposes and resources of concrete political forces and the structures of arising conflicts, five possible outcomes of this process appear” (Przeworski, 1991, p.52). In other words, during this transitional process there is a societal choice of definite institutional design and a combination of selected actors.

It is presumed that the conditions in which this choice (reflected in social institutes) also has influence on the following stage of transition where the question on survival and development of the established institutes will be

solved. Referring to this idea as a basic point, it is possible to present some principal types of transformations. The structure and models of conflicts (mostly among the power elites) can establish and consolidate the democratic institutes. In the case of democratization, the democratic institutes and democratic “rules of game” are really established and preserved (consolidated democratization), or are not established and preserved (a failure of democracy). The opposite type of transformation - the dominant actors begin to struggle for an establishment of dictatorship, which, as a rule, results in a civil war and violence. In this case the new social institutes may include some characteristics of democracy and legacy of a former regime. Przeworski also puts forward an idea about cyclic short period of coexisting democracies and authoritarianism (the so-called presence of transformational opportunity). In this case the democratic institutes are established, but the consent to democracy represents the transitional decision.

Obviously, the development of transformation process in Russia is expected in a direction of the centralization of the power of the ruling elite. This inevitably leads to the contradiction with the democratic institutes. At the same time, ending of the process of transformation, in this case, may be reached through the action of the democratic leadership and overcoming institutional conflicts between the power structures and civic society.

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