

UDC: 321, 323

DOI: 10.17748/2075-9908-2015-7-7/1-41-45

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THE DEGREE OF THE SOVIET POLITICAL CULTURE'S AFFECT ON THE POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN POLITICS

СТЕПЕНЬ ВЛИЯНИЯ СОВЕТСКОЙ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ НА ПОСТСОВЕТСКУЮ РОССИЙСКУЮ ПОЛИТИКУ

The major aim of the work is to define the core aspects of political culture, methods of governmental management which have been taken by the current Russian political elite from the Soviet political cultural tradition. The text presents the author's insight on the political-psychological characteristics of inter-generational changes and succession in the Soviet and current Russian types of governance. The main inference of the works states partial succession and argues against the idea of full transmission of the Soviet political culture into the current one. However, the modern Russian political culture is also to be distinguished within: there is a great divergence between Yeltsin's times and modern Putin's epoch.

Основная задача данной работы заключается в определении глубинных аспектов политической культуры, средств государственного управления, перенятых текущей российской политической элитой из советской политико-культурной традиции. В работе автор представляет свое понимание политико-психологических характеристик межпоколенческих изменений и преемственности между советским и российским типами управления. Основной вывод работы заключается в утверждении о частичной преемственности между двумя эпохами и выступлении против идеи полной передачи советской политической культуры текущей российской. Последняя также должна быть дифференцирована изнутри различиями между временами президента Б.Н. Ельцина и эпохой президента В.В. Путина.

Key words: political culture, tradition, transformation, government, epoch

Ключевые слова: политическая культура, традиция, трансформация, управление, эпоха

I. Introduction

One of the most miraculous features of History is its repetitiveness. It was ably noticed by the Ancient Greek philosophers¹, then developed in the frames of Medieval political ideology² and erected onto the top scientific extent by F. Hegel and F. Nietzsche in their concepts of "dialectic spiral" and "eternal recurrence" that every event arisen by the process of sublation ("*Aufheben*") which happened in a concrete moment on a length of time, can occur again on a higher level of historical ty.³This circularity is especially clear if one considers the history of various empires, which had a smooth process of origin, rise and gradual decline. From this perspective, the Soviet Union is perceived by the different authors as an example of empire albeit with specific typological categorization in accordance to the political, economic, national, cultural and ideological features of the country and the methods of state governance [3; 4; 5; 6; 7 et al.]. However, the whole history of the Soviet Union, its existence from the very beginning of the Russian revolution till the very end should be considered not as one-dimensional indiscrete process, but rather as uneven path with vivid raises and glaring falls with further collapse of this supranational telamon, viewed by many people, including Russian today's government, as a historical and geopolitical catastrophe.⁴ It is namely the Russian current political establishment staying at the helm of the state from the beginning of 2000's recognizes itself as a successor of both Tsarist and Bolshevik legacy⁵ and as no one else tries to recover own legendary status of the Third Rome. What is more noteworthy regarding the scrutiny of the Soviet heritage, Russia as

¹ More strictly, by the Greek Stoic School of philosophical thought, namely by Polybius, Posidonius et al.

² See: N. Machiavelli, *The Prince; Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*. ed. by M.V. Drako. Popurri, Minsk, 2005

³ For more precise definition see: L. Spenser and A. Krauze, *Hegel for Beginners*. Icon Books, 1996

⁴ Vladimir Putin: "Razval SSSR - krupneishayageopoliticheskayakatastrofaveka" via: Regnum, online at: <http://www.regnum.ru/news/444083.html> Last accessed: 9 March 2013

⁵ Obviously, more Bolshevik than Tsarist due to objective reasons of continuity and national memory of millions who lived in the USSR and who still have some, let me say, historical melancholy about that state.

an independent state, unlike many other states especially in Central Asia [8], did not draw its new loop of history from *tabula rasa* trying to forget the Soviet past and to erase own historical memory.

But to what extent may these analogies be considered as correct and meaningful? Does this succession fully repeat and recover the Soviet model, acquitting the latter's whole methodological spectrum of problem-solution, reincarnating it in a modern manner? Is it a question of mentality, a unique cultural identity, that makes the former Soviet and modern Russian elite believe in inevitability to build a state on any other principle than centralization of the most of power in the hands of executive attorney or it is a real danger of impossibility to hold the huge territory with heterogeneous population in any other way? Finally, if we *a priori* assume incorrectness of empirical scrutiny of the Soviet history from the one-dimensional uniform prism, would it be appropriate to observe the post-Soviet Russian political culture fitting it in the same 'Procrustean bed' of our understanding and perception? Answer on these questions requires a deep analysis of the Soviet governing model with simultaneous avoidance from the stereotypes and clichés which potentially can distort this research, as the very name of my topic presumes itself that, yet, the Soviet culture affected post-Soviet Russian politics and the question is to be addressed to the size of that affect and the level of consistency. At the same time, to obtain scientific unbiasedness I will try to examine the question of continuity from the different angles, encompassing in my observations different 'pro' and 'anti' sources related to the subject. To do that, I will embrace three main aspects of the Soviet-Russian hereditary relationship which I assume to be the most important in accordance to the given task: *succession of elites; differences in the state building models; succession of the chosen managerial strategy in domestic and foreign policy.*

2. Comparative analysis of the Soviet and post-Soviet political cultures

First and foremost, let me assert that even with a great effort and desire we cannot consider twenty years of Russian post-Soviet independence as a smooth process that is being remained constantly the same from the 90's up till now. As it was mentioned above, like the distinction between the Soviet rulers and their policy, post-Soviet governing experience should be differentiated and categorized in the frames of two epochs, namely by the antipodal presidency of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. The definitions of these epochs will be give below, but before doing that, let me juxtapose the features between the Soviet and Yeltsin's regimes.

To understand on the basis of what the current Russian political culture is shaped, we should distinguish the main characteristics of the Soviet framework. Two main aspects that can be associated instantaneously with the Soviet rule are the personality cult and unconstrained power of the omnipotent communist party. Generally, they both can be narrowed down to the common denominator, as a person who stayed in power in the USSR always directly associated with the party and they both represented the unity of system. "What no Leninist regime ever did under Stalin, Khrushchev, or Brezhnev<...>was to create a culture of impersonal measured action"[6, p. 213]. That is true, because even if the cult emerged and brought onto the top by the period of almighty Stalinism, however, it did not disappear after the Stalin's death: we can see the features of the worship even in Khrushchev's thaw, Brezhnev's stagnation and Andropov's conservatism. Definitely, one might assume and would be absolutely correct, alleging that the Khrushchev's speech in 1956 undermined the policy of cult, but the given concept in my perception relates not only to the particular individual, but, what is more applicable, to the cult of ideology, to the belief in immutability and absolute rightness of the chosen path towards socialism and communism that continued to exist up until Gorbachev's *perestroika* [9, p. 31]. The latter aimed at least in words to modernize the system, but in deed was a last stop in a point of no return. Whether this being just an occasion or focused policy, but we can state that the same sense of rightness in the chosen way of state development is present today in both domestic and external strategy of governance under the Putin's presidency [10, p. 67]. In accordance to the latter, I partially disagree with K. Jowitt, who wrote that liberal democratic policies do not and cannot rest on the charismatic political leadership, instead, "they rest on 'public virtues'" [6, p. 214]. Given the examples of the post-War K. Adenauer's era in Germany, strict policy of Thatcherism from the mid-70's to the 90's in the UK, I affirm, that there is no contradiction between appealing for a strong leader and having prevailing popular virtues. It is seen from these examples, that a strong leadership can be and, indeed, is an attribute of some democracies, assuming the fact that even the best of them were kept in a tight rein when the times demanded that. However, it has been always complicated to define a clear watershed between a true democratic leadership on its highest level of political control which corresponds to the spirit and letter of democratic law, and the moment when this leadership turns into usurpation of power - and this was, in fact, what happed in the USSR. From this perspective Russian current executives can have either some credit of confidence as Russian post-Soviet political conjuncture is still continuing its formation and any attempt to predict further movement towards either total usurpation or exposed, explicit liberalization seems at least naive and should be measured twice before taken seri-

ously, or one might affirm that, going back to Putin's way of state governance, it is nothing than a telic action to restore the Soviet-style order. Moreover, the *risk of spontaneous democratization, accompanied by simple quantitative blueprinting of the Western democratic model can be no less dangerous for the existence of sovereign and united Russia, than the concentration of power in one's hands*. This was already proved during and after the Yeltsin's presidency which I personally consider as a clear evidence of the difference between real liberalization and leading country to a new downfall.

After the collapse, changes in the entire scope of policy under the Yeltsin's presidency in new emerged Russian state were so heavy and fundamental, that we can hardly speak about succession between Soviet and Yeltsin's era. To some degree of confidence, I would even say that Putin's Russia is more successor of the Soviet legacy despite of the fact that nearly a ten-year gap separates it from the USSR. Largely Putin's Russia succession was contributed and succeeded because of the involvement of the former elite representatives who were closely tied with or engaged in the structures of Committee for State Security (phenomenon of *siloviks*).¹ Diametrically opposite situation prevailed at the Yeltsin's period when, in contrast, the changes were so unpredictable and dependent from the daily fluctuations, that democratic transformation, if we do can name it so, had spontaneous, chaotic and quantitative nature, rather than reminded a qualitative, balanced and purposeful program [Hughes, 2001: 55]. Disappearance of the huge Soviet empire created ideological vacuum, that was tried to fill with as many external ideas as it was possible in any sphere. The plot thickens once we assume Yeltsin's Russia was not only far from the democratic model in the whole essence of that word, but was nothing, but populist authoritarian state characterized in the terms of local political disorder in regions, guided by kinship relations - what C. Ross named 'negotiated federalism' [11, p. 161; 12, p. 37]. The appearance of private property at the beginning of the 90's, despite of the very fact of its appearance, did not create a sensible margin from the previous Soviet period, because 'new' owners of the property in the new emerged conditions were the same representatives of the former Soviet elite, being the only difference with in a new name, oligarchs. Hence, economic distribution and allocation of resources in entity remained the same as the actors were the same and did not want to leave the stage. Meanwhile, though the very process of credible democratization at Yeltsin's times was weak, nonetheless, it created a perfect environment for the appearance of explicit civil rights so that even old elite was unable to stop that transformation. Therefore, it was rather *glasnost*, than *perestroika* that succeeded in Yeltsin's Russia. In accordance to that, if we draw the parallels between Soviet and post-Soviet Russian culture, it would not be groundless to see the similarities between Yeltsin and Lenin or Gorbachev way of state management, as all of them, maybe naively, but truly believed in the possibility to create a new societal order, and none of them achieved the supreme result [13, p. 227], whereas Putin's political worldview is often compatible with Stalinian or Brezhnevian model of governance in association with two aspects: a strong sense of confidence about own rightness in the model of development dominates among people, as it was described above, and the establishment of strong control, supremacy of the executor, supported by appropriate Constitutional power [14, Ch. 4]. However, there are some core variations in the definition: Putin's Russia, unlike Stalinian or Brezhnevian epochs, is not entirely "the externally oriented state based on the principle of the primacy of foreign policy" [5, p. 2]. Partly because Russia today shows more balance and attention towards both domestic and foreign issues due to the absence of necessity (at least so obvious and vivid) to create the image of external enemy, as it was during the Cold War. At the same time a new external danger has been very often, especially since 2005, seen in the wave of Velvet revolutions [15, p. 2], which is not unreasonably considered as a threat for Russian territorial unity, despite of the proclaimed aims and goals. Besides, it seems still far to speak about the cult of Putin, even taking for granted the high rate of his popularity in the country in general [10, p. 66] and among the political class in particular [16, p. 52], which in fact, has been gradually decreasing since his third by the count term of presidency². Thus, one might state that concretely Putin's vision of the main mechanisms that should be implemented and are still being done so can be considered as an evidence of not imitating the entire Soviet model in a rigorous way, but guiding more by the specific policy of particular Soviet leaders. In the coming chapter it will be shown what exact features tie contemporary Russian and Soviet schemes of state governance and why Soviet culture has palpably affected a new Russian model.

3. Soviet bequest and modern Russia

¹ This point will be more precisely discussed in the next chapter

² Putin's Approval Rating Slumps - Survey via: RIA Novosti, online at: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20120824/175408725.html> Last accessed: 8 March 2013

"The [Soviet] model incorporated a federal element. Formally, the state comprised 15 sovereign national republics, but centralized political control over them was guaranteed by the Communist Party's hierarchical chain of command that stretched across all governmental and societal organizations"[Remington, 2007: 38]. From the given definition it is easy to see that the Soviet territorial order and power control are to some extent applicable for and compatible to the modern Russian structure. The constitutional form of federalism¹ in modern Russia nearly repeats the Soviet form: if the federalism in the Soviet Union was largely a formality, the current Russian model *de jure* gives more independence to the regions [14, Ch.3 Art. 72-73; Ch. 8 Art. 130-133] than it was during the Soviet regime, which implies regional governors, appointed by the Kremlin, to enjoy their independence, but "without challenging the center's power" [9, p. 39]. It was especially stressed *de jure* congruence, because *de facto* the power of appointment-making decisions is still kept by the Centre, where "Putin's primary objectives were [*and still are* - notation A. G.] to create a unified economic, legal and security space in the federation and to tighten the federal government's controls over the regions" [17, p. 32]. Apparently, in both Soviet and current Russian cases the separation of territories defines the areas of habitation for different national minorities, ethnic groups - in the Soviet model for all the states, included in it², in today's Russia in the frames of its inner divisions. The second part of the quotation from Remington's text also very reminds delegation of power in contemporary Russia. The loyalty of the links in the Soviet-style political chain was guaranteed by their membership in the Communist Party, meanwhile in modern Putin's Russia, according to some interpretations, the same principle of commitment is seen in the appointment of power agents, *siloviks*, who, due to their belonging, occupy very high positions in the energy sector and political-economic spheres [18, pp. 141-146; 16, p. 45]. Finally, the third similarity of the Soviet and Russian models is concentration of the two major functions by the center, namely, army and allocation of budget [14, Ch.3 Art. 75; Ch.4 Art. 87; Art. 83 d),e)]. Both examples evidence that the question of national security and money supply is viewed as a prerogative of the Center who can hardly share it with the federal subjects. Thus, the description of the main features stressed above legibly indicates the rightness of the assumption about political succession and continuity of Soviet political culture by Russian modern system which presents, referring to the theoretical part at the very beginning of my work, a new loop of historical circularity under the terms of new environment.

4. Conclusion

In Russian and Western literature [13, 19] there are yet some debates about how to treat and define current Russian political model. In that sense I would definitely exclude two extremes to estimate contemporary political system in Russia as pure totalitarian or pure democratic, and will agree with H. Hale, who assigned it to the hybrid regimes [19, p. 33]. On the one hand, if we follow the author's logic, Russia in own 'hybridity' inclines more to the return to the Soviet model and culture, shaping today a "single-pyramid system" [19, p. 35]. But on the other hand we may see that liberalization, even if it proceeds slowly, still occurs and appeals in a form of open criticism or in the reforms designed by the third Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev [20, p. 1439].

This paper does not pretend to evaluate the concept of liberalization in the Russian context in a 'bad' - 'good', 'right' or 'wrong' way. It pretends neither to look at that process from the perspectives of all humanistic lofty values and virtues. Rather, it assesses it from the perspectives of real and potential benefits that liberalization can possibly bear. And this point should be the last one to state that, indeed, contemporary Russian political culture and the model of state building is affected by the Soviet experience, but not to the extent which may allow one to make a conclusion that it simply copies the latter.

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¹ As any other political organizations of the state (Unitarianism, Confederalism) , Federalism has own main features [Ross, 2003: 30-31], which can be slightly changed corresponding to the traits of particular state.

² Some authors would disagree with this statement, as the delimitation of borders pursued in a very rude way[4, p. 201 (Footnote 2), 202], but overall I assume the general principle of "one territory - one nation", established by the Soviet commanders, was entrenched in a rigorous way.

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The article also includes information and quotes from the media sources such as Regnum, RIA Novosti.

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Received: 16.06.2015

For citation the article: Gabrielyan A. The degree of the soviet political culture's affect on the post-soviet russian politics. Krasnodar. *Istoricheskaya i sotsial'no-obrazovatel'naya mys'l' = Historical and Social Educational Ideas*. 2015. Том 7. № 7vol-1. Pp. 41-45.
DOI: 10.17748/2075-9908-2015-7-7/1-41-45

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Получена: 16.06.2015

Как цитировать статью: Габриелян А. А. Степень влияния советской политической культуры на постсоветскую российскую политику. Краснодар: Историческая и социально-образовательная мысль. 2015. Том 7. №7. Часть 1. с. 41-45.
DOI: 10.17748/2075-9908-2015-7-7/1-41-45