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Management Reform and the Dynamics of Civil Society in Russia

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This article analyzes a number of issues related to the reform of public administration at various levels (from central to local) and dependences of this process on changes in the political system. Low impact of the reform and administration inefficiency conditioned by the growth of authoritarian tendencies in the power elite's activities, actual restriction of civil society institutions' activities down to the stagnation of such a society, violation of citizens' constitutional rights are argued. The facts mentioned contradict the national leaders' statements about successful democratization in Russia, conclusions of modern political science and actual practice of the states with democratic regimes.

Keywords: administration, civil society, power, reform, democracy, the power elite, authoritarianism.

Introduction

Problems of administration optimization at federal, regional and municipal levels have constantly been in politicians', scientists', the media's spotlight for the past two decades. They all realize that talking about serious achievements in this area is premature. At the same time the problems associated with the necessity of a civil society formation, its development and real functioning in Russia are widely discussed and mentioned in many speeches of the president and the prime minister, parliamentary deputies, regional politicians, etc. However, ineffective administration is rarely associated with a civil society's weakness and the population's political passivity.

In recent years domestic experts in the field of philosophy and political science dwell upon

the problems of administration in the Russian society and mention an authoritarian nature of political power as well as an individual's traditional authoritarianism, group and mass consciousness (Gibson, 2010). Establishment of modern democracy on the basis of dominant society's authoritarian consciousness is undoubtedly almost impossible within a short space of time. For many centuries (especially during the Soviet era) thoughtlessness and blind belief in the authorities' supreme justice and mission (destined by God or the ideal of communism) as well as the authorities' impeccability were intentionally and purposefully formed in our nation. Thoughtless obedience and the citizens' political passivity are purpose and result of the formation of an authoritarian mind which is the most important

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condition for the exercise of political power in any non-democratic society.

Modern constitutional regime in Russia, declaring the need of broad public participation in administration of the society and state makes the “erosion” of an authoritarian mind legally possible. People’s real participation in decision-making guarantees the implementation of these decisions. It is a truism of the control theory. But it is the point that confronts us with two negative aspects of the whole. First of all, possible involvement of people in administration, taking decisions (particularly political) are still formal, though it is necessary to turn them into real opportunities. On the other hand, human psychology phenomenon being the most conservative element of social reality, consequently leads to authoritarian consciousness. The latter is observed through such “relic” phenomena as legacy of the past passed on from generation to generation through the social heredity mechanism. Secondly, it is a result of domestic “undemocratic democracy’s” efforts which are only indirectly related to real political culture and democratic methods of administration.

Authoritarian government, authoritarianism of consciousness, imperfection of the state machinery, “the bureaucracy’s absolutism”, authoritarian regime ... This “chain” (which is a “circle” at the same time) is real and represents a very serious negative factor in a civil society’s formation and development and a democratic type of leadership and administration. It should be noted that an authoritarian regime, roughly understood as an imperative, is a common sign of any type and form of administration (within certain limits), but other parts of the chain can and must be overcome.

Overcoming authoritarian consciousness in particular is the most complex problem as people’s view on the world is based on the reflection of the surface layers of social reality perceived in

everyday life. Getting knowledge of the essence faces such obstacles as general population’s lack of education and traditionally authoritarian ruling elite’s activity.

Example

The domestic municipal reform is a very good example of the mentioned above. Its importance and necessity at all levels of administration are much spoken about but it has been making no progress since 2003 when notorious Law 131 was adopted. Something has been undoubtedly done on the basis of this law over the years, but what has been done can be hardly considered a reform and on no account a successful one. A natural question arises: Why is nothing coming out of it? In our opinion, the answer can only be found in the analysis of the dynamics of federal and regional state authorities, state administration and civil society as the administration at a municipal level is always determined by essential characteristics of the state federal government and regional administration. This is a political pattern which in no way depends on local self-government, a phenomenon a municipal administration is meant to be and called so. A serious discussion about real self-government can be possible if only based on real and specific diversification of power, but certainly not under the circumstances of its real centralization, which has been a leading destination in Russian internal politics of the last decade. In addition, any talks about self-government development are nothing more but demagogy especially at a time when those small sprouts of civil society that actually emerged in the 90’s of the last century are rolling up.

A political reform as a process of power centralization began with the abolition of gubernatorial elections. Prior to that the heads of federal subjects had a relative independence from the federal center. To ensure their independence from regional parliaments they widely took

advantage of the possibility to elect deputies from several parties, including local ones, as well as the possibility to elect independent deputies on the basis of a majoritarian system. Governors' autonomy clearly prevented an authoritarian power center's strengthening, so the regional leaders, who are actual heads of the state's appointees now, are formally endowed with parliamentary powers in the regions where the party in power always plays the first fiddle. Such a system prevents a governor from maneuvering between various party factions of a local parliament. Governors have become Centre dependent.

The governors who were federal state politicians and had to prove their real ability to govern the region effectively in the fear of non-election for another term have turned into high-ranking officials. This fact in itself argues the reality of Russian federalism. Nowadays governors are totally dependent on a powerful state and one-party hierarchy. Therefore, they are also dependent on public opinion and public initiatives which fall within a civil society's competence. Here we face the same party-state nomenclature from which we have been trying to escape by criticizing the inefficiency of the Soviet era administration.

It must be noted that the practice of appointment the governors is directly connected with harmonization of the federation political systems or, in other words, with a gradual winding down of the federalism elements in the country. It is a logical result of the power centralization (it is enough to remember a Soviet style "federalism" at the times of an absolutely centralized system of the party leadership). But a local self-government or, more specifically, a modern municipal administration of a democratic type inherently involves many elements of federalism at the lower levels of administration system. Examples of foreign states show that the state itself may be a unitary both formally and actually (France,

Britain, Italy), but a local administration of a democratic type (real self-government) is always based on federalism principles regarding relations between municipalities and relations between municipalities and state authority. Complete uniformity of municipal administration, forms and methods of their work are totally unacceptable even in traditionally unitary democratic states. Their formation and operation are impossible and unacceptable without the participation of civil society institutions.

In Russia changes in electoral law are vividly observed through the entire political system unification to the lowest administration levels and repression of emerging democracy's first steps. Elections at all levels have ceased to be competitive. Though being far from absolute, it is a very serious indicator of a non-democratic political system. In this respect some aspects are worth considering.

So, to ensure a dominant role of the party in power in the subjects of the federation during federal parliamentary elections electoral alliances were banned which a democratic country can't afford. In reality prohibition of alliances serves the purposes of the central authority only as it is impossible to establish any associations, supporting "their own" leader in the region against the wishes of the Centre.

But it was not enough: the central authority has taken care to create such conditions when small parties, especially regional ones, simply ceased to exist. This was caused by the amendments to the Law on political parties, introduced at the end of 2004 and concerning a party registration, according to which at least 50,000 individuals' membership was required for a party registration. Undoubtedly, the number of parties declined sharply. Small parties that had previously been actively involved in regional and municipal elections simply disappeared. The way to a total domination of one party both in

the center and in the regions was further cleared by the introduction of the seven percent threshold for the parties' membership in the State Duma. Of course, the same threshold is being gradually established in all the regions.

A couple of simple but highly effective techniques have been implemented: the "against all" line has been cancelled to hinder the possibility of protest voting significantly and the voter turnout threshold has been abolished. It must be mentioned that the "election pill" was sweetened in a typically demagogic way with loud statements about democratization. We mean the amendments to the legislation: the number of signatures that the parties must gather for their registration has been slightly reduced; the parties that have won from 5 to 7 percent of the votes during the elections to the State Duma are granted 1 or 2 mandates that is regarded to be a "consolation prize".

All these «events» have born fruit: totally predictable results of any elections both presidential and regional ones; real signs of the return to a one-party system with the presence of multiparty-system formal indices; strengthening the executive branch regarding legislation at all levels – federal, regional and local; excessive expansion of the presidential authority that allows to assume that Russia is no longer a presidential but a super-presidential republic (a dream of a person with an authoritarian "strong hand" mentality is probably starting to come true).

With such a significant centralization of power at the "upper" levels it is naive to believe that a truly self-government will be established at a municipal level. The changes, observed now, are directly opposite to the processes of democratic changes. More and more federation subjects switch over to a proportional electoral system while organizing regional and local elections. Lists of the party in power always receive a majority in local legislatures beyond all doubt.

The practice of abandonment of the municipal administrations heads' direct elections is widely implemented. This is certainly permitted by the law but it can't facilitate a civil society's establishment and development, self-government of a democratic under our conditions. Public local organizations are actually suspended from elections organization and conducting. Therefore, they can't participate in administration, representing the interests of different population groups. The examples of removal of municipalities heads, elected by the population, from office by the decision of superiors or authorities in vertical central authorities are not uncommon. Embodied in the Law on governors' appointment (2004), this represents a logical switch to a "lower" level of administration. It is the possibility at which the head of the state can dismiss an unwanted head of the region because of "loss of confidence".

Small elements of democracy and civil society which have appeared in the country, the growth of authoritarian tendencies in administration at all levels are reasoned by the necessity to strengthen the vertical power as well as by the population's political passivity, unpreparedness to accept the democratic values which evolved in Western countries over centuries. Undoubtedly, the Russians haven't got enough electoral experience; there is neither a developed system of links between the civil society elements, nor any of those elements themselves. But if it took the western countries long to achieve a modern type of democracy, this process is many times faster nowadays as it is based on the experience of democratic regimes. If the domestic ruling elite is seeking not only for holding power at any price but also for having democratic reforms the necessity of which is tirelessly stated then the political reform aspects outlined above (power and control centralization, actual transition to a one-party system) can't be logically explained.

Conclusion

Taking everything mentioned above into account, the following conclusion can be drawn: the elite seeking for holding the power for a long time and forever simply can't cope with running the country. So, it applies simple authoritarian methods in administration and the power maintenance, such as the "order – execution" method, for example. The methods are always directly related to power and bureaucracy centralization, turning federalism, government and civil society to fiction. We think that inability to organize effective administration is due to ill-conceived, hasty, even some reform-feverish activities of the authorities such as the municipal reform, the endless tax reform, the monetizing of privileges, the educational reform, the housing and pension reform, transformation of the militia to the police, etc. The results of these "transformations" are notorious or predictable.

Real democratization must be linked to restoration of citizens' full voting rights, development of these rights in accordance with international patterns, extensive implementation of a majoritarian electoral system along with the proportional system in elections at all levels (Keane, 2009). Liberalization of legislation on political parties and public organizations is an absolutely necessary essential element of a civil society. Until this is done even the existing civil society elements are in a state of stagnation and neither raise the level of the population's activity, nor influence the power and managerial decisions. Consequently, these solutions are not legitimate. Therefore, they are executed not to convince people of their fairness, usefulness for

individuals' and society's daily lives. They are often not fulfilled at all.

Political leaders at all levels should abandon the stereotypes of the past when the ruling elite feared their own people, did not trust them, restricted their activity in every way, ensured its domination by ideology and repression. Nowadays the philosophy of power articulates a dialectical unity of two sides of democratic society: being a governmental organization, the state has "its other" in a civil society, and the latter, in its turn, is also the power organization. What is meant is that the state's "powerful impulses", primarily expressed in the Law, can be perceived by the citizens both directly and through civil society institutions. But in the latter case individuals' and groups' susceptibility to the decisions of the government significantly increases as the decisions receive additional legitimacy in "their own" institutions (organizations).

The more developed a civil society is, the more complicated the system of administration and powerful legal relations is (the word "system" is understood as a variety of elements related to each other and forming some kind of unity (Koptzeva et al., 2010). As for the society in general, it is more stable: the power has two bases – the state and a civil society which equalize each other, preventing both the state's tyranny (that is dictatorship) and civil chaos and anarchy, ensuring democratic freedoms. The state delegates increasingly more authority to civil society institutions. In this sense a civil society is an organization of power. Scientific validity and a real value of such conclusions are proved by the practice of modern democratic regimes.

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Реформы системы управления и динамика гражданского общества в России

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Статья посвящена анализу ряда проблем, связанных с реформированием государственного управления на различных уровнях – от центрального до местного, зависимости этого процесса от изменений в политической системе. Аргументируется прямая обусловленность низкой результативности реформ и неэффективности управления нарастанием авторитарных тенденций во властной деятельности правящей элиты, реальное сужение поля деятельности институтов гражданского общества, вплоть до стагнации последнего, нарушение конституционных прав граждан. Все это противоречит и заявлениям отечественных лидеров об успешной демократизации в России, и выводам современных наук о политике, и реальной практике государств с демократическими режимами.

Ключевые слова: управление, гражданское общество, власть, реформа, демократия, властвующая элита, авторитарность.
