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President Vladimir Putin's Third Four-Year Term: Contradictory Outcomes – an Expected Result



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In mid-March, Vladimir Putin's third four-year presidency came to an end. If the term of office of the head of state were not prolonged in 2008, then the seventh presidential election would take place today, and therefore, a critical question arises: "What has been done and what needs to be done?... What does the President have in store for the people?"¹

Expert opinions about Vladimir Putin's work in the period since 2000, when he began his first presidential term, have been ambiguous so far. On the one hand, it is associated with stabilization of the socio-economic and demographic situation in the country after the "turbulent" 1990s, the rising standard

of living in the middle of the "fat 2000s", the strengthening of national identity and international prestige of Russia in the 2010s.

On the other hand, the period of Vladimir Putin's presidency is called the period of "missed opportunities", which means, above all, the preservation since the 1990s of the oligarchic-comprador system of governance, and the chance for an industrial breakthrough lost in the mid-2000s, which would ensure Russia's economic security and competitiveness.

Both points of view have a lot of supporters and are fair because they reflect the contradictory nature of the results achieved by Vladimir Putin over the past 15 years. However, in our opinion, **the performance of a top-ranking politician like the head of state**

¹ Razuvaev V. Vladimir Putin preuvelichil obeshchaniya [Vladimir Putin Has Exaggerated His Promises]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], 2016, March 15.

should be evaluated primarily on the scope and quality of strategic vision of the country's development prospects taking into account its current situation, as well as the effectiveness with which the strategy chosen is implemented.

In this sense it is necessary to look into the past and recall once again the goals Putin set out during the period when he was elected President for the first time.

During the crisis period of the late 1990s, the elite that was in power needed a President who would allow it to preserve the privileges obtained as a result of the completely socially unjust and predatory privatization. Therefore, the successor of Boris Yeltsin on the post of head of state was doomed to be “in a serious emotional and moral dependence on the regime that had given him power by making him a successor”.

However, V. Putin had a sober assessment of the current state of affairs in Russia largely thanks to his experience of working in law enforcement agencies before he became Prime Minister². Having assumed office as Prime Minister (August 1999), Vladimir Putin was closely involved in the Chechen issue and through his determination in carrying out the anti-terrorist campaign he already showed

² In 1985–1990, Vladimir Putin serves at the local intelligence office in Dresden. Starting in June 1991, Putin began to work as Chairman of the Committee for International Relations at the Saint Petersburg City Hall and from 1994, concurrently held the position of Deputy Chairman of the Saint Petersburg City Government. In March 1997, he was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office and Chief of Main Control Directorate. In May 1998, Putin was made First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office, and in July 1998, he was appointed Director of the Federal Security Service. From March 1999, he also held the position of Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. In August 1999, Putin was appointed Prime Minister of the Russian Government (source: personal website of the RF President. Available at: <http://putin.kremlin.ru/bio#y80-e>).

himself as a politician who was not going to confine himself to words only, and would consistently move from words to deeds³.

It was about the preservation of the country as such: “*My colleagues, many presidents and prime ministers told me later that they had already decided everything for themselves: Russia would cease to exist in its present form. The only question was – when it would happen and what the consequences would be. They meant that Russia was a major nuclear power*”⁴.

Putin described his understanding of the situation in the article “Russia at the Turn of Centuries”, published in “Rossiyskaya Gazeta” on December 30, 1999.

In this article he highlighted “the main points for consolidation of the Russian civil society – what can be called the primordial, traditional values of the Russians” (“patriotism”, “great power statehood”, “social solidarity”). The article sets out clearly the measures that need to be taken for the recovery of the Russian economy and strengthening government authority.

The article “Russia at the Turn of Centuries” also shows that the notions that Vladimir Putin deals with, tasks and questions that he puts before himself and the country are designed not just for years, but for decades. “How do we see the place of our country in the

³ “The Chechen campaign was costly for Russia. Thousands were killed, and Chechnya was all but obliterated. But the people, already accustomed to feel like eternal losers, were not confused by this. Many said then that for the first time the government has seriously got down to business...the War in Chechnya has made Putin the man who could not lose the election” (source: Kendall B. Who is Putin? *BBC NEWS World Edition*. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/1156020.stm>).

⁴ Politov Yu. Voskresnyi vecher s “Prezidentom” [Sunday Evening with the “President”]. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* [Russian Newspaper], 2016, April 26. Available at: <http://rg.ru/2015/04/26/putin-site.html>.

Russia has exhausted its limit of political and socio-economic upheavals, cataclysms, and radical transformations. Only fanatics or those political forces that are deeply indifferent to Russia and to its people are able to call for another revolution. The state and its people will not stand one more abrupt destruction of everything, no matter what slogans it may have: Communist, national-patriotic or radical-liberal. The patience and the ability of our nation to survive, as well as to create, are at the very limit of exhaustion. The society will simply collapse economically, politically, psychologically and morally.

Putin V.V. Russia at the Turn of Centuries.
Russian Newspaper, 1999, December 30.

global community in the 21st century? What are the boundaries of economic, social and cultural development that we want to reach in 10 or 15 years from now?”. When asking such questions, it is impossible to expect that the full answers will be obtained within one or two presidential terms. It characterizes Putin, first of all, as a politician who “takes a longer view”, as a statesman who sets a historically significant goal for the country, who understands the need to achieve these goals, and who is aware of his historic responsibility before the country.

The program article “Russia at the Turn of Centuries” was prepared by V. Putin during his term in office as Chairman of the RF Government, in anticipation of Boris Yeltsin’s resignation. On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin announced the appointment of Vladimir Putin as interim President of the Russian Federation. On the same day, Putin issued a Decree on the immunity of the first President of Russia and

members of his family from any administrative or legal prosecution⁵.

March 26, 2000 Russia held presidential elections, which Vladimir Putin won with 52.9% of the vote. After his inauguration on May 07, 2000, Putin officially became President of the Russian Federation, and Mikhail Kasyanov was appointed Prime Minister. The experts regarded this move “as part of the agreement between the new head of state and the “family” group, which, having lost its center (in the person of Boris Yeltsin), hoped to keep the key positions in power”⁶.

One of the main tasks the President had to face in 2000 was to preserve the Russian economy. In order to increase the revenues of the federal budget, which in 1999 (the last year of Boris Yeltsin’s presidency) was 615.5 billion rubles, Putin introduced mineral extraction tax through the amendment to the Tax Code of the Russian Federation from January 01, 2002. The oligarchic clan, weakened after the default of 1998, was forced to divide its revenue with the government. As a result, in 2002, budget revenues increased to 2,204.7 billion rubles, i.e. by 3.6 times compared to 1999.

In general, in the period from 1999 (the last year of Boris Yeltsin’s presidency) to 2003 (the last year of Vladimir Putin’s first presidential term), compared to the period

⁵ Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 31 dekabrya 1999 g. №1763 “O garantiyakh Prezidentu Rossiiskoi Federatsii, prekrativshemu ispolnenie svoikh polnomochii, i chlenam ego sem’i” [Decree of the RF President of December 31, 1999 No.1763 “On Guarantees to the President of the Russian Federation Who Terminated His Authorities, and Members of His Family”]. *Argumenty i fakty* [Arguments and Facts], 2015, March 26. Available at: <http://www.aif.ru/dontknows/file/1475256>.

⁶ Makarkin A. *Mikhail Kas'yanov, chinovnik-tekhnokrat* [Mikhail Kasyanov, the Technocrat Official]. Available at: http://www.compromat.ru/page_11446.htm.

of 1995–1999, there are positive changes in all the key indicators that show the development of the economy and standard of living (*insert 1*).

February 24, 2004, Putin dismissed the Kasyanov government⁷, noting later that “the first year and a half he tried to do something; during the second two years, the outcome was null”⁸. From March 05, 2004, that is, a few days before the next presidential election (March 14, 2004), the Government of the Russian Federation was headed by Mikhail Fradkov, whose views were “quite close to the views of the President’s “power team”⁹.

Thus, during his first presidential term, V. Putin’s ability to address the issues that he set out in his election article were restricted considerably by dependence on the elites. However, the elites were surprised when they learned that “the strategic clean-up of the country will affect them directly”¹⁰. Nevertheless, Putin’s main goal set out during his first presidential term was achieved. He managed to get positive results in solving the Chechen issue, one of the main problems of Russia, and the legally binding mechanism that helped withdraw part of the raw-materials-export rent allowed the budget to be replenished at the expense of the oligarchs.

⁷ In the period from February 24 to March 5, 2004, the Government was headed by Viktor Khristenko.

⁸ Vlasova E. Vybrat’sya s “Bolotnoi” [To Get Out of Bolotnaya]. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* [Russian Newspaper], 2011, December 16. Available at: <http://rg.ru/2011/12/16/putin-site.html>

⁹ Glikin M. Sil’nyi administrator [Strong Administrator]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], 2004, April 2.

¹⁰ Delyagin M.G. Vtoroi period pravleniya V. Putina: razrushenie liberal’nykh mifov [Second Period of V. Putin’s Reign: Destruction of Liberal Myths]. *Nakanune.ru* [On the Eve.ru]. Available at: <http://www.nakanune.ru/articles/17523/>.

The country entered a period of stabilization, and the most dangerous degradation processes of the 1990s were suspended.

During the second presidential term (May 2004 – May 2008), it was necessary to increase Russia’s economic power. The favorable period of growing oil prices helped deal with economic problems. The dynamics of official statistical data shows that in 2003–2007 (the last full year of V. Putin’s first presidential term and the last full year of his second presidency), there was an increase in GDP growth rate (by 3.7% compared to 1999–2003), in industrial production (3%), in per capita monetary incomes (80.8%); the proportion of the population with incomes below the subsistence level decreased (6.2%). The improvement of economic situation was reflected in subjective assessments of the population: in 2003–2007 in comparison with 1999–2003, the share of positive judgments about the situation in the country continued to grow (+10 percentage points; see insert 1).

In order to preserve the possibility of pursuing the chosen course of development after the end of his second presidential term, on December 17, 2007, at the convention of the “United Russia” party, Vladimir Putin offered Dmitry Medvedev’s candidacy for the post of Russian President. May 07, 2008, Dmitry Medvedev nominated Vladimir Putin for the post of Prime Minister. The next day the proposal was approved at an extraordinary meeting of the State Duma of the Russian Federation.

When carrying out a so-called reshuffle, Putin could not “look back” to the West. Everyone understood the superiority of influence on the part of the current Prime

Insert 1. Dynamics of the main indicators of development of economy and standard of living of Russia's population

Indicator	1995	1999	1999 compared to 1995, %	1999	2003	2003 compared to 1999, %	2003	2007	2007 compared to 2003, %	2007	2011	2011 compared to 2007, %	2011	2015	2015 compared to 2011, %
Economic development*															
GDP, trillion rubles	43.9	43.2	98.4	43.2	56.2	130.1	56.2	75.2	133.8	75.2	79.5	105.7	79.5	80.8	101.6
Federal budget revenues (billion rubles)	227.0	615.5	271.1	615.5	2586.2	420.2	2586.2	7779.1	300.8	7779.1	11386	146.4	11386.0	13665.7	120.0
Industrial production, billion rubles	29.7	28.7	96.6	28.7	36.1	125.8	36.1	46.5	128.8	46.5	47.0	101.1	47.0	48.0	102.1
Consumer price index, % (December to the December of previous year)**	231.3	136.5	787.7*	136.5	112.0	250.7*	112.0	111.9	169.2*	111.9	106.1	159.1*	106.1	112.9	151.4*
Standard of living*															
Average per capita money income, rubles	9886	9365	94.7	9365	12151	129.7	12151	25574	210.5	25574	29608	115.8	29608	30514	103.1
Average monthly accrued wages, rubles	9059	8574	94.6	8574	16861	196.7	16861	27584	163.6	27584	33337	120.9	33337	36692	110.1
Proportion of population with money incomes below the subsistence level, % of the total population	24.7	28.3	114.6	28.3	20.3	71.7	20.3	13.3	65.5	13.3	12.7	95.5	12.7	13.4	105.5
Data of sociological polls about the results of year for Russia (as a percentage of the number of respondents)***															
“Very successful”, “good in general”	no data	19.6	no data	19.6	38.5	+19	38.5	48.6	+10	48.6	40.4	-8	40.4	19.2	-21
“Sooner difficult”, “bad, very difficult”	no data	66.1	no data	66.1	41.6	-25	41.6	29.0	-13	29.0	42.7	+14	42.7	64.0	+21
It is difficult to answer	no data	13.8	no data	13.8	19.2	+5	19.2	22.3	+3	22.3	16.9	-5	16.9	16.7	0
	December 1999 Boris Yeltsin's second presidential term			January 2000 – May 2004 Vladimir Putin's first presidential term			May 2004 – May 2008 Vladimir Putin's second presidential term			May 2008 – May 2012 Dmitry Medvedev's presidential term			May 2012 – present time Vladimir Putin's third presidential term		
<p>* At constant prices of 2015.</p> <p>** Dynamics of change in the consumer price index for the period was calculated with the chain index.</p> <p>*** The wording of the question is “How would you estimate the end of the year for Russia as a whole?” Instead of the data for 1999, the table provides the data for 2000 (the year when the survey started).</p> <p>The data of the public opinion monitoring carried out by ISED T RAS were used. The monitoring is conducted since 1996 once every two months with the participation of 1,500 respondents aged over 18 in Vologda, Cherepovets, and in eight districts of the Vologda Oblast (Babayevsky District, Velikoustyugsky District, Vozhegodsky District, Gryazovetsky District, Kirillovsky District, Nikolsky District, Tarnogsky District and Sheksninsky District). The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the observance of the proportions between the urban and rural population, the proportions between the inhabitants of settlements of various types (rural communities, small and medium-sized cities), age and sex structure of the oblast's adult population. The method of the survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents. Sampling error does not exceed 3%.</p>															

Insert 2. Level of trust in the RF President in different socio-demographic groups
(as a percentage of the number of respondents)*

Socio-demographic groups	1999	2003	2003 compared to 1999	2003	2007	2007 compared to 2003	2007	2011	2011 compared to 2007	2011	2015	2015 compared to 2011
<i>Sex</i>												
Men	56.5	62.9	+6	62.9	57.9	-5	57.9	47.6	-10	47.6	56.2	+9
Women	57.5	65.4	+8	65.4	62.1	-3	62.1	52.8	-9	52.8	64.1	+11
<i>Age</i>												
Under 30	57.9	72.8	+15	72.8	61.9	-11	61.9	53.4	-9	53.4	57.4	+4
30-55	57.7	62.0	+4	62.0	60.7	-1	60.7	49.8	-11	49.8	62.1	+12
Over 55	55.2	59.4	+4	59.4	57.9	-2	57.9	49.2	-9	49.2	60.5	+11
<i>Education</i>												
Secondary and incomplete secondary	55.5	58.7	+3	58.7	54.2	-5	54.2	44.2	-10	44.2	51.7	+8
Secondary vocational	60.7	67.6	+7	67.6	59.4	-8	59.4	52.3	-7	52.3	62.4	+10
Higher and incomplete higher	55.8	66.4	+11	66.4	68.5	+2	68.5	55.6	-13	55.6	68.8	+13
<i>Income groups**</i>												
20% of the poorest people	51.8	52.3	+1	52.3	47.1	-5	47.1	36.2	-11	36.2	41.0	+5
60% of the people with median income	59.4	68.6	+9	68.6	62.6	-6	62.6	51.1	-12	51.1	64.9	+14
20% of the most prosperous people	57.9	72.3	+14	72.3	75.9	+4	75.9	65.5	-10	65.5	73.2	+8
<i>Territories</i>												
Vologda	59.2	74.1	+15	74.1	57.8	-16	57.8	51.4	-6	51.4	65.4	+14
Cherepovets	42.0	62.5	+21	62.5	77.4	+15	77.4	64.1	-13	64.1	72.2	+8
Districts	64.2	60.6	-4	60.6	52.9	-8	52.9	43.2	-10	43.2	51.4	+8
Oblast	57.1	64.3	+7	64.3	60.3	-4	60.3	50.5	-10	50.5	60.6	+10
	January 2000 – May 2004 Vladimir Putin's first presidential term			May 2004 – May 2008 Vladimir Putin's second presidential term			May 2008 – May 2012 Dmitry Medvedev's presidential term			May 2012 – present time Vladimir Putin's third presidential term		
<p> positive change is highlighted in green (the increase in the proportion of positive assessments)</p> <p> negative change is highlighted in red (the decrease in the proportion of positive assessments)</p> <p>* Instead of the data for 1999, the table provides the data for 2000 (the year when the survey started).</p>												

Minister, but Medvedev's rhetoric was more acceptable to the mentality of foreigners. "This whole thing with the successor was in many respects an attempt to protect Russia from drastic revolutionary scenarios of power shift"¹¹.

During the period of his presidency, Dmitry Medvedev has not achieved any significant results and, in fact, remained President in a "technical" sense¹². The results of sociological research clearly reflect the dynamics of public opinion concerning its work: in the period from 2007 to 2011, his credibility dropped by 6–13 p.p. in all socio-demographic categories (insert 2).

However, despite the many economic difficulties that Russia experienced in 2008–2012, Dmitry Medvedev managed to fulfil his main task – to maintain the strategic course pursued by V. Putin and to hand him the presidency in 2012.

Vladimir Putin's third presidential term began in May 2012 in difficult and contradictory conditions. On the one hand, Putin had the support of society, which by that time had already formed a need for a qualitatively new level of life. Putin was waited for and people pinned on him their hopes for a new round of economic well-being – the same as was in the mid-2000s. On the other hand, the four years of D. Medvedev's presidency consolidated

the position of the liberal-minded elite in power. In fact, Medvedev chose the people surrounding him both as President (2008–2012) and as Prime Minister (since 2012 and up to the present).

In the beginning of Putin's third presidency, political scientists began to note that Vladimir Putin started to "quietly push the liberal party away", although, as some experts forecasted, "he cannot oust it completely, because he would become a hostage to the siloviki (a Russian word for politicians from the security or military services who came into power), on the one hand, and on the other hand, he would quarrel with the West"¹³. Nevertheless, the events of 2013–2015 showed that it is not a problem for Putin to "quarrel with the West". In September 2013, in his speech at the meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, he virtually declared Russia the center of the Eurasian integration. The Ukrainian conflict, which followed thereafter and which had its peak in 2014, led to the increased tension in relations between Russia and the United States to the extent that many compared this period to a new round of the "cold war"¹⁴.

As a result of confrontation with the United States, even in difficult economic conditions caused by the global financial crisis, sanctions, and the remaining raw-materials-exporting model of the economy, Putin has managed

¹¹ Delyagin M.G. Vtoroi period pravleniya V. Putina: razrusheniye liberal'nykh mifov [Second Period of V. Putin's Reign: Destruction of Liberal Myths]. *Nakanune.ru* [On the Eve.ru]. Available at: <http://www.nakanune.ru/articles/17523/>.

¹² "Though Putin restyled himself as prime minister, there is a broad perception that Putin, rather than his successor Dmitry Medvedev, remains the dominant politician" (sources: Megan K. Stack "Putin Leads in This Power Dance". *Los Angeles Times*, 2008, November 14. Available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/nov/14/world/fg-russpower14>).

¹³ Delyagin M.G. Vtoroi period pravleniya V. Putina: razrusheniye liberal'nykh mifov [Second Period of V. Putin's Reign: Destruction of Liberal Myths]. *Nakanune.ru* [On the Eve.ru]. Available at: <http://www.nakanune.ru/articles/17523/>.

¹⁴ Mirovalev M. "Russian Premier: We have Slid into ... a New Cold War". *Los Angeles Times*, 2016, February 13. Available at: <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-russia-nato-20160213-story.html>.

to achieve one of the two conditions, which experts have noted as necessary for the industrial breakthrough, and which Putin had been expected to achieve in early 2012 – he was able to provide a “guarantee of national sovereignty”¹⁵.

This can be considered one of the main results of the third four years of Vladimir Putin's presidency. “Strengthening the support of the authorities at the expense of foreign policy and the struggle for national interests is no doubt an important direction, and Vladimir Putin has taken the winning position in this field in the eyes of public opinion”¹⁶.

Thus, during all his presidential terms, Vladimir Putin had to deal with global challenges in conditions of dependence from the political and financial elite that had come to power in the 1990s and had become an integral part of the Russian state. This dependence was different in different times: in 2000, it was dictated by the need to take into account the interests of the elite created back in the 1990s, in 2008 – the need to temporarily

“recede into the background” of the political arena so as to be able to continue his strategic line since 2012. Three things are obvious in this regard:

1. During the period from 2000 to 2015, Putin had to act cautiously, with an eye on the domestic political elite, on the reaction of foreign leaders, and on the requirements of the Russian society. He is a “very cautious politician. He looks before he leaps. He does everything gently, but his movement is directed all the time toward the recovery of our national sovereignty”¹⁷. So, can we reproach him for his desire to make an industrial breakthrough, similar to the 1930s but without using Stalin's methods and acting as cautiously as possible?¹⁸ It no coincidence that “social justice, equal rights for all and a strong state that cares about its citizens” are deep in the mental foundations of the Russian society, and for the Russians they represent “the ideal model of government”¹⁹.

¹⁷ Starikov N.A. *Prokladka oligarkhov* [Gasket of Oligarchs]. Available at: <https://nstarikov.ru/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Starikov-Prokladka-oligarkhov.rtf>.

¹⁸ Vladimir Putin:

1. “Stalinism is associated with the cult of personality and mass violations of the law, with repression and camps. Nothing like this exists in Russia today and, hopefully, it will never be anything like this again” (Stenogramma Pryamoi linii s Prezidentom RF V.V. Putinym ot 25.04.2013 [Transcript of the Direct Line with Russian President Vladimir Putin of April 25, 2013]. *Ofitsial'nyi sait Prezidenta RF* [Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation]. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17976>).

2. “Russia is not afraid to intervene in world affairs, it just acts with maximum caution. We are not afraid, we just behave more discreetly. And if we do something, then we try to protect ourselves from possible negative consequences”. (Source: Documentary film “The World Order”. TV channel “Russia-1” – RTR)

¹⁹ Gorshkov M.K. “Russkaya mechta”: opyt sotsiologicheskogo izmereniya [“Russian Dream”: Experience of Sociological Measurement]. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya* [Social Studies], 2012, no.12, p. 7.

¹⁵ S. Chernyakhovsky: “Many would like to divide the territory, and the resources of Russia. This can be prevented only in one case – if Russia will now make the leap, the same leap as it made in the 1930s, and will over 10 years restore its strength to be able to continue to keep this threat away. There are two points that need to be solved as a prerequisite. **It is the guarantee of national sovereignty. And second, we need to move away from a market economy**” (source: Delyagin M.G. Vtoroi period pravleniya V. Putina: razrushenie liberal'nykh mifov [Second Period of V. Putin's Reign: Destruction of Liberal Myths]. *Nakanune.ru* [On the Eve.ru]. Available at: <http://www.nakanune.ru/articles/17523/>).

¹⁶ Turovskii R. Vnutrennyaya politika: obretenie strategicheskogo kursa [Domestic Policy: the Attainment of a Strategic Course]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], 2016, April 18. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2016-04-18/9_course.html

2. Putin understood and understands very well the global historical tasks that the current situation places before him. He solves emerging historical problems consistently, despite the fact that it is contrary to the interests of the West and the liberal wing of the government. Sometimes it was necessary to “walk a tight rope” and make very tough decisions.

3. From the first years of his presidency, Vladimir Putin faced the necessity to oppose the oligarchic-comprador system developed in the 1990s. His independent position has become particularly evident in his third term in office. It should be remembered that Putin “took over” the country that was actually in ruins, which was the pessimistic result of a natural competitive struggle of the major powers for supremacy in the global political arena. He had to consider the interests of leaders of other countries, but as a result of successful implementation of his course, he made it possible for Russia to demand the same from them. Moreover, the events of the latest years (Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts) suggest that today Russia is one of the main contributors to the maintenance of legal mechanisms for peace and security that were founded after World War II.

Today, the personality of the President is “the key stabilizing factor for the political system”, and this is very important because “the State Duma campaign of 2016 can become a turning point in Russia’s political development... There is a critical issue of transformation of the political system, which would allow it to adapt better to different

challenges – both external and internal, while addressing current social-political tasks”²⁰.

Today’s political elite still comprises a constellation of bureaucrats who operate since the 1990s. Society and the President of the Russian Federation are more and more dissatisfied with their performance over the latest 15 years.

It is obvious that the Russian society needs the renewal of the elites and the revival of public life. “The attitude of the elite, the consciousness of which has been formed by strategic competitors of its country, is akin to that of the guard to his prisoners. The Pro-Western part of the elite, striving for integration and “basic human goods”, loses its own civilizational (not to mention national) values and (often unconsciously) begins to serve the values of its strategic competitors (in Russia, for example, they serve the efficiency of the firm against the efficiency of the society, i.e. competition against justice)... This is what the erosion of the value system begins with, which then erodes the society. The growing misunderstanding between the society and the elite objectively increases the threat of destabilization, and with that – the need of the elite in foreign aid; and the force that gladly provides this aid has already been formed”²¹.

²⁰ Turovskii R. Vnutrennyaya politika: obretenie strategicheskogo kursa [Domestic Policy: the Attainment of a Strategic Course]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], 2016, April 18. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2016-04-18/9_course.html.

²¹ Delyagin M.G. Globalizatsiya i predateľstvo elit [Globalization and Betrayal of the Elites]. *Zavtra* [Tomorrow], 2016, January 14.

The consistent implementation of Russia's strategic goals by the President indicates that favorable conditions are being created for the solution of another problem – nationalization of the elite. The levels of support of the head of state in the society are consistently high²², and there is a new generation of public officials, politicians, public figures, which “inevitably accompany the sovereign growth”²³.

In addition, one of the latest steps of the President was the creation of the tool for the further implementation of the chosen strategic course of Russia's development. December 31, 2015, Vladimir Putin signed the Decree on the new National Security Strategy²⁴, which reconsiders the key issues pointed out by V. Putin in 1999 in his program article “Russia at the Turn of Centuries” at a new level, taking into account the internal and external environment that has changed over 15 years.

The strategy establishes personal responsibility of the head of state for ensuring the implementation of priority directions of state policy in the sphere of national security, which, of course, aimed at the effective

solution of key tasks of Russia's development, including the nationalization of the elites, bringing the private needs of the liberal-minded top authorities in accordance with national interests.

Thus, on the one hand, the results of Vladimir Putin's work as President of Russia are controversial. Negative processes in the dynamics of the Russian economy are not associated with sanctions or with the consequences of the global financial crisis, but with the inefficiency of the current system of public administration – this is the task upon which the President focuses his attention. “There is a feeling that there exist two Russias: one is deeply embedded in the Western world, in Western consciousness, in Western way of life... The other Russia, which forms a new growing branch of the state, is in a very complex interaction with the former, but this interaction is not always hostile. But these two Russias reveal themselves in today's ideological and political clash. A new generation of Russian statesmen that inevitably accompany the growth of the sovereign power must have amazing flexibility, durability, multidimensionality of their activities and their judgments. This explains the imaginary inconsistency Russian politics. It is often a compromise, inaccurate rhetoric that is explained. These people are forced to move along the edge of political controversy. They have a complex consciousness and understanding of the fact that the new Russian state has to mature in conditions of confrontation and compromise. Let us be

²² According to VTsIOM, in March 2016, 74% of Russians were ready to vote for Vladimir Putin at the next presidential elections. This is the maximum for the past four years (source: *VTsIOM Press Release No. 3051*. Available at: <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115604>).

²³ Prokhanov A.A. Gosudarstvo Polyarnoi zvezdy [The State of the Polar Star]. *Zavtra* [Tomorrow], 2016, March 1.

²⁴ Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 31 dekabrya 2015 g. №683 “O Strategii natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [Decree of the RF President of December 31, 2015 No.683 “On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation]. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* [Russian Newspaper], 2015, December 31. Available at: <http://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html>.

far-sighted and patient, let us examine today's world not through the eyes of immediate fights, but with a foresight of future ideas about the destiny of the Russian state"²⁵.

However, on the other hand, the current contradictions existing in the state administration system are a natural result of the President's work and indicate, first, the ongoing but not yet complete struggle of the head of state for bringing the interests of the elites in line with the interests of national security.

The system of government is a single organism in which it is impossible to change everything overnight (Russia already had such an experience in 1917). Much of what was planned by Vladimir Putin in 1999 has been executed. Moreover, it has been done **consistently, on time and gradually**, as "softly" as possible for a society that went within one or two generations through the change of a social and political order, several economic crises and a radical restructuring of public consciousness.

However, many challenges still have to be addressed. The President should lead the country to a new stage of industrialization, and this transition should be implemented as smoothly and carefully as Vladimir Putin's strategic course was for the last 15 years.

Only four months are left before the elections to the State Duma, and we see that the strategy for Russia's development that Putin talked about back in 1999 is being consistently implemented by him, despite internal and external political and economic obstacles. The next two years until the 2018

²⁵ Prokhanov A.A. Gosudarstvo Polyarnoi zvezdy [The State of the Polar Star]. *Zavtra* [Tomorrow], 2016, March 17.

How to make the new, market-based mechanisms work at full capacity? How can we overcome the deep ideological and political split in society, which is still evident? What strategic objectives can consolidate the Russian people? How do we see the place of our country in the global community in the 21st century? What are the boundaries of economic, social and cultural development we want to achieve in ten or in fifteen years? What are our strengths and weaknesses? What material and spiritual resources do we have today?

Putin V.V. Russia at the Turn of Centuries. *Russian Newspaper*, 1999, December 30.

presidential elections may become a transition to a new stage of development of the Russian society. The stage which was talked about after the "Crimean spring"²⁶ and which was delayed as a result of economic problems that have befallen the country in recent years²⁷.

How long will this transition period be? Will it be completed in 1–2 years (that is fast enough from a historical point of view) or will it require much more time? It will depend on how Russia can stay on the path chosen 15 years ago. And it will also depend on the

²⁶ Osipov G.V. *Ne upustit' predstavivshiysya shans! Sotsiologiya i ekonomika sovremennoi sotsial'noi real'nosti* [Not to Miss This Chance! Sociology and Economics of Contemporary Social Reality]. Moscow: ISPI RAN, 2014, pp. 16–18.

²⁷ "For the first time after the default of 1998, Russia found itself in conditions of unpredictable falling of incomes of the population. The hole in the budget for the first time exceeded 3.5% of GDP. Real incomes turned negative already in 2014 – for the first time in 15 years. Then in 2015, pensions began to decline in real terms". (Source: Bashkatova A. *Ob ekonomike libo khorosho, libo nichego* [We Say the Economy Is OK or We Say Nothing]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], 2016, April 15)

actions of the head of state: whether he will be able through active work, to implement the provisions laid down in the National Security Strategy of 2015 and move to a mobilization

version of the new industrialization, without which it is impossible to reduce the widening gap between the economies of the leading countries and Russia.

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