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PROBLEMS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN XXI CENTURY. THE CASE OF RUSSIA

Resume

The main research objective of the article was to assess the nature and the way of the transformation of Russia's political system over the past 23 years. The process of transformation taking place there, was analyzed in the context of Samuel Huntington's Third Wave paradigm, which, in the opinion of the author, was considered the most corresponding to the changes occurring in Russian Federation after 2000. In connection with the above, an attempt was made to answer the following research questions: Firstly, what was the specificity of the democratization of the political system during last 23 years in Russia? Secondly, whether a de facto retreat from democratization began in the first decades of the 21st century? Thirdly, whether the political system of the Russian Federation can now be considered fully authoritarian? Democratic transformation in Russia in the near future is assessed as problematic, and the possible scenario of such events seems non-representational at this moment. As can be seen from the in-depth analysis, democratization is not a state achieved once and for all, it is an extremely complex form and requires constant, systematic improvement and subjective participation of citizens, which the political system of Russia is still not characterized by. The most useful research methods that author used in writing this article were the case study, the decision-making and systemic methods.

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy and democratization are not new phenomena. However, scientific attempts to define them on a wider scale were made only in the 20th century. Since then, a number of concepts and theoretical approaches have emerged subjecting such changes occurring in the political systems of many countries around the world to analysis. The phenomenon of democratization would have to be defined as *a long, endless and not necessarily effective process of transition from a non-democratic regime to a democracy, which can stall, regress or even fail completely.*[2] The first characteristic feature of democratization is its multi-stage nature - it involves 3 major phases: liberalization, transition and consolidation of democracy (Antoszewski, 1999, 194.). The second feature is its multidimensional nature (Grzywna, Lustig at al. 2017, 490–499.) The process of change involves various aspects of life: political, economic, social. Among the factors and prerequisites that affect the success / failure in the process of expanding democracy are both internal (the duration and type of non-democratic regime overthrown, the type and manner of transition to democracy, the historical experience of the state, the national-ethnic structure, the existence or absence of civil society) and external (the current situation in the world and the region, the distribution of forces and interests in the international environment, the foreign policy of neighboring) (Bujwid-Kurek and Mikucka-Wójtowicz 2015, 39). Democratization does not always lead to the establishment of a democratic system. Sometimes "turbulent" political changes lead to the formation of hybrid (flawed) systems, that is, systems that are characterized by both elements of democracy and authoritarianism or the establishment of a new authoritarian regime (Ágh 1998, 11–13). The development of research in the field of transitology has also allowed the creation of adequate tools and mechanisms for measuring democracy. The scale and methodology used to measure the state of achievement of democratization by different researchers varies depending on the chosen definition of a democratic regime.

[2] Read more: Ágh 1998; Linz and Stepan 1996; Morlino 2011; Whitehead 2002; Przeworski 1991; Antoszewski 2015; Huntington 1995.

"THIRD WAVE" OF SAMUEL HUNTINGTON- FRAMEWORK OF THE CONCEPT

Among the most frequently cited theories explaining the democratization process, a special place is occupied by Samuel Huntington's paradigm. In 1991, he published the book "The Third Wave: Democratization at the End of the 20th Century", where he presented his new perception of democratization. It had proved to be a groundbreaking work, and it dynamized the development of research in this field of science. The author stated that democracy and the processes of its spread are unstable, fragmentary, changeable, and compared them to ocean waves. By that is, the spread of democracy around the world occurred in *waves* that affected different countries around the world at different periods of history. Surveying a series of transitions and transits from non-democratic regimes to democracies, he points out that a *„wave" of democratization* is „a series of transits from non-democratic to democratic regimes occurring during a certain historical period and when the number of such transits far exceeds the number of transits in the opposite direction during the same period" (Huntington 1991, 26) .Having analyzed the historical events of the past two hundred years, the researcher concludes that the establishment of democracy does not necessarily lead to its consolidation. According to Huntington, after every *wave of democratization* begins a *wave of retreat from democracy.* Therefore, this approach should be considered as more reasonable and rational compared to other theories of democratization. It is an objective and realistic view of the flow of political and systemic transformations in world history. Accordingly, in the presented article based precisely on Samuel Huntington's paradigm, it analyzed the transformation process of the Russian Federation from beginning of XXI century to the present.

The research problem was formulated in the form of a question about the character of the phenomenon of democratization in the Russian Federation in 21st century in the context of Samuel Huntington's "Third Wave". The purpose of reflection is to determine the course of the phenomenon of democratization of the political system in the Russian Federation - a country that is at the "crossroads" between Central Europe and Asia. Analyzing the political transformations and achievements in the democratization of Russia in 21st centuries, the authors attempt to answer the main research question: Has a de facto retreat from democratization begun in the first decades of the 21st century? It

is also worth considering what kind of political system we are currently dealing with? If it is a dictatorship, as some claim, how did democracy fail after a quarter-century of transition in the indicated country? In order to obtain answers to the research questions, it was chosen classic methods for the social sciences, such as the decision-making, systemic, comparative and case study methods.

RETREAT FROM DEMOCRACY IN XXI CENTURY IN RUSSIA

The liberalization initiated by M. Gorbachev's in 1985 ended in failure for undemocratic Soviet Union and "started" the Third Wave of democratization of the largest country in the world, Russia. During next 10 years (after the dissolution of USSR) much was done to establish a viable democratic regime, despite serious economic crises and the military threat of disintegration of the country. The greatest achievement of this period was the adoption of a new democratic Constitution as well as the relative stabilization of the political situation at the end of the 20th century. In 2000 in Russia, it was elected a new president -Vladimir Putin. His determination, consistency and clear agenda had received the approval of the majority of Russian society, which was tired of the political and economic uncertainties of the 1990s. The first step taken by Russian President V. Putin in the direction of creating a strong state was administrative reform, initiated with the formation of seven federal districts in May 2000 and the introduction of the institution of representatives of the President of the Russian Federation (President of the Russian Federation 2000). The reform established a federal executive division, linking the center with local power centers and "restored" control of the state, while concentrating and strengthening the powers of presidential authority. The next step in consolidating the federal state became the adaptation to the Constitution of the Russian Federation of the legislation and regulations of the federation's subjects, primarily the republics that had declared their sovereignty. During this period, V. Putin began dismantling the oligarchic system. Vladimir Gusinsky was the first oligarch who was stripped of his media empire because he tried to actively influence the course of public policy. Then the businessman Boris Berezovsky was stripped of his influence and forced to leave for the UK. Gradually, they were pushed out of decisive influence on politics and also other oligarchs who helped B. Yeltsin to win the presidential election.

In 2001, adopted the law "On Political Parties" and in 2002, its amended version (Federal Law "On Political Parties" N95-FZ). The law established a "membership barrier" for the parties (their numbers cannot be less than 10,000), mandatory representation in the regions and provided them with state financial assistance. The provisions contained in the law, regarding certain electoral solutions, practically excluded regional and local parties, as well as any gubernatorial associations, from running for parliamentary elections (Jendrysko 2016, 143) In 2002, centrist fractions proposed an amendment to the Law on Political Parties, allowing heads of ministries and departments to remain party members. These changes, of course, promoted stability and fusion in the political and party system, but worked against democracy.

In December 2001, on the basis of the bloc of "Fatherland – All Russia" and "Our Home - Russia" was formed a new power party – "United Russia" (in Russian – "Единая Россия"). The popularity of this party of power in the first years after its formation created V. Putin's support for a fundamental change in the electoral law to a proportional one with party lists and for raising the electoral threshold from 5% to 7%, which basically eliminated from the political game a significant part of the real opposition (Czachor 2015, 341). The process of strengthening federal power (including the president personally) has culminated in the introduction of a bureaucratic regime, officially called "managed" ("sovereign") democracy, which is non-modernist in nature and focuses on ensuring that the bureaucratic apparatus maintains power (Słowikowski 2010, 33–60).

On December 7, 2003, parliamentary elections to the Duma were held. The necessary electoral barrier was overcome by 3 parties ("United Russia", KPRF, LDPR) and one electoral bloc – "Rodina". The ruling party in the new composition of the State Duma became United Russia, having won 246 seats in total. By the end of January 2004, the number of members of the United Russia faction had reached 306, as it was joined by some non-partisans and representatives of other parties. For the first time in Russian political history, an absolute parliamentary majority was formed on the basis of a party-leader. Moreover, in the Duma elected in 2003, the liberal opposition was already absent (Kommersant 2022). Predictably for all, in the next presidential election, which was held on March 14, 2004, V. Putin was elected president of Russia for the second time, winning 71.31% of the vote in the first round.

In December 2004, it passed a law stipulating that the heads of the regions are chosen by the legislature from a list of nominations submitted by the president. If parliament refuses to approve three consecutive presidential candidates, the head of state has the right to dissolve that parliament. The president's candidates are then approved or disapproved by the newly elected parliament (President of the Russian Federation 2006). This step was motivated by the need to increase the efficiency of the country's federal and regional authorities and strengthen the fight against terrorism. Although, no doubt, it strengthened the position of the president. In March 2005, began the practice of dismissing regional heads with the phrase "loss of confidence" (RG.RU 2004). In the spring of 2005, passed a law on elections to the State Duma. According to the provisions included, deputies are elected solely from party lists, while territorial representation in the State Duma (single-mandate electoral districts) was abolished. Amendments to the federal law were also adopted, allowing the party that won the regional parliamentary elections to propose its candidate for governor to the Russian president. In the vast majority of regions, this right belonged to United Russia, so the process of governors joining the party took on a mass character. At the beginning of 2007, 70 of the 86 leaders of Russian regions were members of United Russia. Also joining the party of power were top managers of large industrial enterprises, heads of state universities and their structural units, top officials of federal and regional governments. So back in 2005, the annual Freedom House report for the first time described Russia as a country "not free" (Freedom House 2005).

W. Putin has succeeded in subordinating the mass media during his two terms in office. This has made it possible, in particular, to radically change the approach of television channels to reflecting all power activities and their perception in Russian society (Reporters Without Borders 2006). In the media, economic progress was cleverly used to build the image of V. Putin and his supporters. Empowering state propaganda began to create a true cult of the president's individual, portraying him in the right way. Journalists and human rights activists trying to understand what was happening in the field of human rights often risked their lives and health. Violence (just to recall the murders of journalists Anna Politkovskaya and Pavel Khlebnikov) is a serious threat to freedom of expression in Russia (Reporters Without Borders 2006). Oligarchic control over the media was then replaced by state control (RG.RU 2006). In the 2008 press freedom ranking of the organization Reporters

Without Borders, Russia was ranked 144th out of 173 countries that were included in the ranking (Reporters Without Borders 2008). In 2006, was passed a law abolishing the minimum voter participation rate threshold (Federal Law of 5 December 2006 N 225-FZ On Amending the Federal Law "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referendums of Citizens of the Russian Federation" and the Civil Procedure Code of the Russian Federation). In this period, the column "against all" on the ballots was abolished (thus depriving citizens of the opportunity to express their protest in the elections) (Federal Law of 30.06.2006 On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Part of Cancelling the Form of Voting Against All Candidates).

During the periods of Putin's presidency, the personnel policy of the presidential administration and other organs of state power was characterized by the appointment of his numerous former colleagues, friends, and business partners with whom he became close during his work in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) to key positions. A significant source of cadres for his administration were friends from the cooperative "Lake" (in Russian - кооператив «Озеро») (BBC Russian 2014). These cadres formed the backbone of the Putin regime, whichch is called the "Putin clan" or "Putin Family" (Артемов 2012).

"LIBERALIZATION" OF DMITRY MEDVEDEV

In December 2007, in the subsequent Duma elections, the pro-presidential party "United Russia" won a constitutional majority (315 out of 450 mandates) (Duma 2007), and this allowed it to make almost every decision in the Duma. This ensured the adoption of full control of the political scene by a single party, on which, however, allowed the functioning of a concessionary opposition. In accordance with the Constitution, V. Putin could not be a candidate for president for the third time. Moreover, he assured that "we will never change the Constitution "under ourselves" (Телеканал Дождь 2020). So in the 2008 presidential election, he supported a member of his team, the young technocrat Dmitry Medvedev, who won the election with 70.28% of the vote. Considered more liberal than Vladimir Putin, President Dmitry Medvedev set as his main task an extensive program of state modernization, aimed at renewing the Russian economy and society, reducing the country's dependence on oil and gas. Moreover, he emphasized that "modernization will not be possible without democratization and the development of civil

society institutions". He stressed that a balanced democracy would provide the political and economic flexibility that Russia needs, and assured that Russia's political system would be open, flexible and complex. He also initiated a major reform of the judiciary, and launched a campaign against corruption in Russia. During his presidency, D. Medvedev initiated liberal changes - the restoration of direct elections of governors (Federal Law "On Amendments to the Federal Law "On General Principles of Organisation of Legislative (Representative) and Executive Bodies of State Power of the Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation"; Federal Law "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right to Participate in Referendums of Citizens of the Russian Federation" of 02.05.2012 N 40-FZ) the liberalization of the rules for registering political parties (Federal Law of 02.04 2012 N 28-FZ "On Amending the Federal Law "On Political Parties"), the lowering of the suffrage threshold in parliamentary elections (Federal Law No. 41-FZ of 02.05.2012 "On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Connection with Reducing the Minimum Percentage of Voters' Votes Required for Admission to the Distribution of Deputies' Mandates in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation"). These changes were important for the democratization process, but no major and deep structural transformations took place during his term. Dmitry Medvedev, however, was not a stand-alone politician. Being one of Vladimir Putin's closest allies, he worked with him in a *president-premier* tandem and proved his personal loyalty by withdrawing his candidacy from the next elections in 2012. At one time considered a very flexible politician, in the eyes of many, especially in the West, he thus damaged the reputation as a liberal he had enjoyed during his presidency (Forsal.Pl 2018).

On December 4, 2011, elections to the State Duma of the sixth term were held, which resulted in the pro-Putin "United Russia" winning for the third consecutive time, with 238 mandates. The parliament saw the emergence of groupings of the well-known concessionary opposition (Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Fair Russia, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation 2011). The official results of the vote provoked significant protests in the country, as various falsifications were reported on a massive scale on the day of the vote. Numerous protests were held in most major Russian cities on December 10, 2011, and one of the largest rallies was held in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square (in Russian - Болотная

площадь), where were gathered between 75,000 and 150,000 participants (Грани.Ру 2011). Another wave of protests, which was huge in scope, was caused by the results of the March 4, 2012 presidential election, when V. Putin won for the third time with 63.60% of the vote. The elections used the same methods of falsifying the results as in the parliamentary elections as well. The largest action turned out to be the one called "March of the People" or "March of the Millions", which took place in Moscow on May 6 to protest the inauguration of V. Putin. About 100,000 people came out to Bolotny Square. But the protest was successfully suppressed by the police forces (Самедова 2012). From that time mass protests or strikes were and are immediately suppressed by the police or army. Participants in the actions were detained and arrested (Bartnicki 2011, 134).

CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN POLITICAL REGIME IN RUSSIA

Unlike authoritarian regimes in Africa or South America, the opposition still existed and continues to exist in Russia, although its positions and authority in society are severely undermined (Bartnicki 2011, 137). The fading strength of the opposition often flows from its internal and absurd disintegration and the conformism of its individual leaders. There was also the case of the murder of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, which should be attributed to the actions of the regime, but there is no direct evidence of this.

Having monopolized the political scene, the ruling party "United Russia" easily won a constitutional majority and in the next parliamentary elections to the State Duma: as in 2016, gaining 343 mandates out of a possible 450, as in the last elections in September 2021. - 324. Traditionally, the parliament has included: Communist Party of the Russian Federation (having won 42 mandates in 2016 and 57 in 2021), Fair Russia (having won 23 mandates in 2016 and 27 at the last election held in autumn 2021) and LDPR (having 39 mandates in 2016 and 21 in 2021), continuing to declare their "oppositionism" (CEC of the Russian Federation No. 56/541-7 of 23 September 2016; CEC of the Russian Federation No. 61/467-8 of 24 September 2021). In this way, they are further creating the illusion of democratic choice for Russian citizens and the Western world.

V. Putin's enormous popularity was not shaken by either the war with Georgia, the financial crisis or the handover of the presidency to Dmitry Medvedev. Moreover, the criminal annexation of Ukraine's Crimea strengthened it even more. So on March 18, 2018, he won the election without much trouble and was elected president of Russia for a fourth term, receiving 76.69% of the vote. D. Medvedev remained prime minister of the government. In July 2020, enacted a series of amendments to the Constitution, (1993) among which was a particularly important clause to abolish restrictions on the number of presidential terms and allow the re-election of a person who serves as president at the time the amendments take effect as well. Thus, Vladimir Putin was given the right to delete ("zeroing", in Russian – "обнуление") his presidential terms after 2024, thereby gaining the de facto right to be re-elected until 2036 (Federation Council (State Duma Committee on State Construction and Legislation). According to the Democracy Index ranking, the current regime in Russia is considered as authoritarian (Economist Intelligence Democracy Index 2022). And according to the reports „Freedom House" Russia is a country without freedom (Freedom House Report 2022) with consolidated authoritarian regime (Freedom House Report 2022). Various terms are now being used to characterize the modern political system of the Russian Federation, which took form in the first decades of the 21st century. Many political analysts term this regime as authoritarianism, the core of which is super-presidential power, based on one-person-President V. Putin and the cult of his person (Shevtsova 2010, 267; Czachor 2018, 190). Some define the current regime as "rival authoritarianism" (Słowikowski, 2011, 35–36), "authoritarianism" (Bartnicki 2010, 219–220) or even as a "soft totalitarian regime" (Radio Free Europe 2006). It is also possible to encounter terms such as "controlled democracy" (Isajew and Baranow 2008, 193), "imitative democracy" (Lachowicz 2014, 121–122), "authoritarian-democratic hybrid" (Prokop 2015). Some even refer to the political system of the modern Russian Federation as an "Asian democracy" (Potulski 2012, 167).

CONCLUSION

In 2000 Russia had a chance to enter the next stage - the stage of consolidating democracy and overcoming the typical for post-socialist state problems. However, the gradual socio-political transformation initiated by the new President V. Putin (who was elected head of state

through democratic elections in 2000) showed the opposite movement; a gradual shift away from democracy began. Even when D. Medvedev was president, V. Putin remained a key and central figure in the state, serving as prime minister. In the first decade of the 21st century, the third wave of the retreat from democracy began in Russia. The current political system of the Russian Federation is classified as authoritarianism, the unifying element of which is super-presidential power, based on the individual V. Putin, despite the fact of having a democratic constitution. The chances of initiating a democratic transformation in the near future are today assessed as negligible, and the scenario of such events is inconceivable. The case of Russia and the history of its last thirty years show that S. Huntington was right, democracy as well as the processes of its spread are unstable, changeable and temporary. Democracy is not given once and for all. If "is not fought for" it is quite possible to establish a new authoritarian system. Thus, analyzing the changes in the political system of the Russian Federation we can conclude that the third wave of democratization, which began in the late 1980s, has already changed in the first decade of the 21st century in Russia to the third wave of retreat from democracy. The example of Russia only confirms the rational statement of S. Huntington that democratization, like ocean waves, may prove to be a short-lived and volatile phenomenon.

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ПРОБЛЕМИ ДЕМОКРАТИЗАЦИЈЕ У XXI ВЕКУ. СЛУЧАЈ РУСИЈЕ

Сажетак

Главни циљ истраживања овог чланка био је да се процени природа и начин трансформације политичког система Русије током последње 23 године. Процес трансформације који се тамо одвија, анализиран је у контексту парадигме Трећег таласа Семјуела Хантингтона, која је, по мишљењу аутора, највише одговарала променама које су се дешавале у Руској Федерацији после 2000. године. У вези са наведеним, покушано је да с одговори на следећа истраживачка питања: Прво, која је била специфичност демократизације политичког система у последње 23 године у Русији? Друго, да ли је у првим деценијама 21. века почео *де факто* повлачење од демократизације? Треће, да ли се политички систем Руске Федерације сада може сматрати потпуно ауторитарним? Демократска трансформација у Русији у блиској будућности оцењује се као проблематична, а могући сценарио таквих догађаја тренутно делује нерепрезентативно. Као што се може видети из дубинске анализе, демократизација није стање које се постиже једном за свагда, то је изузетно сложен процес и захтева стално, систематско усавршавање и учешће грађана, чиме се политички систем Русије још увек не одликује. Истраживачке методе које је аутор користио при писању овог чланка биле су студија случаја, метода доношења одлука и систематске методе.

Кључне речи: Русија/Руска Федерација, демократизација, Семјуел Хантингтон, Трећи талас демократизације

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