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YOUTH POLICY IN MODERN RUSSIA. ABSENTEEISM AND POLITICAL PROTEST

The article analyzes the features of the current youth policy of the Russian Federation aimed at raising the political culture. Despite the current activities of the government institutions in the field under study, absenteeism, as well as the protest potential of the young people, remains at a fairly high level. In this regard, the government acknowledged the importance of forming a positive image of the state power in the eyes of young people and strengthen its influence in the sphere of forming loyal associations, which is not always positively perceived among the youth. The work focuses on the fact that raising the loyalty of youth organizations is one of the factors of political stability, both in case of internal turbulence and external influence. The authors also focus on the beneficiaries of youth protests. The authors paid special attention to the issue of forming political leadership among the youth and the absence of leaders expressing the opinions of young people in modern Russian politics. At the same time, youth protest as a social phenomenon lack class and in some cases ideological differences. The authors come to the conclusion that despite the steps taken by the government and political parties to involve Russian youth in the political agenda, the young people reject "leaders" of youth opinion imposed by the authorities, either cultivating non-participation in the electoral campaigns or demonstrating latent protest voting.

Key words: *youth policy, civil society institutions, absenteeism, political protest, political system, political leadership, political culture.*

As was rightly noted by one of the most renowned researchers of the Russian youth I.M. Ilyinsky: “Youth is the main value of society, a phenomenon not only demographic, but also economic, social and political [4. P.5-14].”

The above thesis found its logical continuation in the works of V.K. Krivoruchenko [5. P. 33-35], V.A. Lukov [6. P. 44-50] and others.

It should be noted that within the framework of such a humanistic approach, the formation and subsequent implementation of the youth policy aimed at developing the political culture of the youth becomes a strategic task of the government in the new world, where human capital becomes just as important and strategic asset as energy. At the same time, it should be noted that the level of absenteeism in Russian society, resulting from the stagnation of the political system, has a significant impact on the level of political culture of Russian youth. This is the result of the longstanding hegemony of one political party, administrative pressure on the opposition and its representatives during the election campaigns, as well as the absence of real political competition and alternative political leaders. In turn, for certain social groups, including young people, absenteeism is also due to the crisis of ideology and the lack of political power, that they could consider a representative of their interests. It should be noted that one of the factors of youth absenteeism in Russia is an affiliation of the majority of youth movements and projects with the state institutions.

Considering that absenteeism is considerably low in the societies with a high level of political culture, raising this level among the youth is in the sphere of implementation of the state youth policy and is one of the criteria of its effectiveness.

In 2014, the Government of the Russian Federation adopted the Fundamentals of the State's Youth Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025 [11]. It was after the approval of the above-mentioned document and the corresponding consolidation in the Russian legal field of the relevant conceptual apparatus that the terms: “youth,” “young specialists,” “young families,” “youth project,” “youth entrepreneurship,” etc., appeared in other regulatory legal acts determining state policy in the field of socio-economic development.

The Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, government authority competent in the field of youth policy, also activated its work as one of the main organizers and curators at the state level of such well-known youth forums as “Seliger,” “Territory of Meanings” and “Tavrida,” and youth projects “You are a businessman,” “Rospatriotsentr”, etc.

The political party dominating in modern Russia also became actively involved in the development of youth political participation within the framework of formation of its youth wing - Young Guard of United Russia (MGER).

Today, MGER is the most mass youth organization in Russia (about 175 thousand people) with representative offices in all 85 regions of the Russian Federation [8].

At the same time, under the auspices of the legislative and executive authorities, at both the federal and regional levels, youth political platforms were formed

and gained a certain status. The concept of the youth parliament or council was used as a standard model for such platforms. In this case, the aim of youth parliaments is determined by the course of the ruling political class [1. P. 101-112].

It can be said that at the present stage the Russian authorities re-initiated the unused since the 90s of the 20th century mechanism of formation of youth movements and organizations under the patronage of federal and regional authorities aimed at developing a loyal attitude of the young people to the existing political system and political regime. In addition to the above factor, the political aspect of the youth organizations that has emerged in this way is due to the historical imperative tradition in which the government viewed the youth as a separate social group that should be organized and controlled under the auspices of its authority. In this format, the young people become a resource of power, an object of its influence to achieve certain political goals [3. P. 41-54].

The government is interested in strengthening such a construct due to the substantial potential of the young people political activity and mobility [13. P. 254-257].

At the same time, it should be noted that the affiliation of youth movements and the state does not always correspond to the political preferences of the social group considered in the study and, in this regard, the image of such organizations may require improvement [7. P. 9-18].

Today, a number of major Russian opposition political parties also have "youth wings," among which the most active are: Zhirinovsky's Falcons, a wing of LDPR, the Leninist Communist Youth Union of the Russian Federation, a wing of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the youth branch of the Yabloko party and others [14. P. 95-106].

However, the parties view young people only as a certain part of the electorate, returning to the problems of the young people only during the election campaigns, which significantly contributes to the negative perception of this approach by the young people. Considering that traditionally the participation of the young people in the elections is not very high, the relationship between the opposition parties and young people can be described in chess terms as a "stalemate" situation. The parties, not seeing a special electoral potential of the youth, do not properly focus attention on the current youth agenda and the young people, feeling the inert attitude of the political parties and do not participate in the elections.

In contrast to such approach, representatives of the so-called "non-systemic opposition" act differently. A series of color revolutions and resonant anti-government rallies in the countries of the Maghreb, the Middle East and the Balkans, color revolutions in the post-Soviet space, where young people constituted a substantial part of the protesters, demonstrated a necessity for a more critical understanding of the youth absenteeism, being formed in Russia.

Mass participation of young people in political protests is considered by the authorities in the context of such an urgent issue as the maintenance of stability of the existing system [2. P. 9-14].

In this regard, the issue of political leadership among the young people and deficit of such leaders in the Russian political environment gains additional relevance [10. P. 19-28].

As part of the struggle for leadership in the youth environment, two existing concepts confront. One promotes youth leaders from the government, whom the authorities cultivate in the youth organizations, obviously or latently affiliated with the authorities. Such youth leaders become an absolute clientele of the current government, an “official” youth. Meanwhile, such youth organizations in fact do not fulfill one of the main goals of the youth policy, they do not raise the level of political culture among the youth in general. This is due to the fact that such organizations rely on separate, to a certain extent elitist, groups of young people who are already initially set to actively participate in political activities and do not need additional motivation for such participation.

A different case is when an independent leader appears in the youth community, when he has a certain authority and political potential, but is devoid of substantial administrative support, “the leader from the people.”

The unwillingness on the part of some young people to accept the imposed “leader from the authorities” is one of the factors behind the growth of latent protest, including among politically inert youth groups. Protest behavior can be expressed in active participation in the political activities, for instance, membership in a political party, participation in rallies, demonstrations, etc., or can be latent and become manifest only during the election campaigns and expressed in the voting against the candidate put forward by the authorities.

As was rightly noted by A.V. Skiperskyh: “Protest behavior during the election period may be either in the form of non-voting or a deliberate reluctance to interact with this institution, or in the form of a protest strategy realized right at the polling station” [12. P. 63].

In fact, we can say that the excessively high level of state participation in the formation of youth organizations has led to a certain consolidation of protests of the skeptically minded young people and the gradual transformation of this social group into one of the elements of the Russian political system, which becoming a surprise for the Russian authorities.

A curious fact about the oppositionally-minded Russian youth is the formation of the so-called “youth social stratum”, which has special interests and specific problems. It leveled the factor of different social groups to which young people belong, including from the point of belonging to different youth subcultures, or different material situations, erasing the “class” aspect of both youth absenteeism and protest [9. P. 158-168].

At the same time, it is necessary to take into account that the youth protests in modern Russia, as, indeed, in the world practice, are triggered and controlled by the “adults,” who make skepticism about the state power the basis of their protests and present active protests as the only form of influence on the authori-

ties. Such politicians have their well-defined and understandable political goals, or in some cases, material interests and also, for objective reasons, cannot claim the status of all-Russian youth political leaders.

Thus, despite an activation of the mechanisms of the state youth policy, the majority of Russian youth are still outside the Russian political agenda. Russian young people who do not accept excessive state control over youth associations, do not see political parties expressing their interests and do not cultivate political leaders in their midst, are not integrated into the state's political system, as a real actor influencing state policy formation. In this regard, the level of political culture in the youth environment does not develop and, therefore, absenteeism becomes one of the latent forms of political protest of the Russian youth at the present stage.

A high level of absenteeism in the youth environment is often a precursor to the development of radical ideas and political trends and also distorts the real results in the field of government youth policy.

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