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REVIEW

of the article by Grishaeva O.N., Popova S.I., Belyaeva V.P.,
Grishina V.O. “The Fourth Presidential Term of V.V. Putin:
New Challenges”

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The topic of the article “The Fourth Presidential Term of V.V. Putin: New Challenges,” in our opinion, is one of the most important, if not the most important in the study and analysis of the current political process in Russia. One can only welcome the passionate desire of a group of researchers of various scientific and educational statuses - from the candidates of science, associate professors of a university to an employee of a general education institution and a student – to identify, describe, classify and analyze how Russian experts perceive the fourth presidential term of V.V. Putin and how the fourth term of the president corresponds to the real political agenda. And this last task or goal is closely related to the question of the nature and fate of V.V. Putin's political regime.

We would like to emphasize that aspect in principle and stress primarily not so much the content of the article, the order or logic of the material being submitted and analyzed, as to indicate the uniqueness of the team (group) of researchers. It is rarely, very rarely that one can observe the processes of formation of research teams, which include both experienced and completely young people interested in being in the ranks of the academic researchers. Such examples should be fully supported and conditions should be created to extend such forms of scientific work. Appreciation should be expressed to the editorial board of the journal, which supports the publication of this article providing its pages for it. It is well known what obstacles arise when the research-minded students are cut off from the practical scientific work because of the erroneous policies and bureaucratic procedures according to which unknown, young and still unrecognized researchers lower the ratings of academic journals. In this case, the approach was different. Such different logic of scientific creativity, it seems to us, is capable of inspiring this group of researchers to continue its studies.

It is important to emphasize that the article is about the system of views of the expert and academic community of political scientists from among Russian analysts who want to understand the most complex vicissitudes of the Russian political regime created and managed by such an extraordinary figure in modern politics as V.V. Putin. Perhaps we are somewhat exaggerating the objective and subjective reasons followed by the Russian expert community, analytical and sociological centers in order to deal with such issues. What can we say about this in relation to the expert community! This process still needs to be explained in the right language. But of course, the authors of the article, in their plans and efforts, held to the conviction – “the desire to understand the complex vicissitudes” of Putin’s political regime and Putin’s rule during the fourth term of the presidency!

V.V. Putin’s presidential rule since 2000 and especially his fourth term in office, which began in 2018 and is to be completed in six years, and his current state are undoubtedly something peculiar. The fourth term of V.V. Putin is characterized by such changes in external and internal challenges, without the understanding of which it is impossible to take a single step in any field of social, political, economic or public activities. But what objective material for the correct and accurate analysis do we have? If you use the keywords “Putin’s regime” in the Yandex search engine, then among the ten top links you will find such texts with obviously determined or predetermined meanings as: “When will Putin’s regime fall?”, “ Putin’s regime will get stronger, ” “War will sweep away Putin’s regime,” “Next three scenarios of the collapse of Putin’s regime,” “ Putin’s regime: point of no return has been passed.” You can expand the search for connotations of this topic. And there you will find mass signs of negative reflections on the regime and its subject - President V. Putin. The authors of the article under review have a more relaxed and balanced view on the issues of the fourth term in office: the next term of V. Putin’s rule has not surprised either the public or the political science community; on the one hand, the democratic process is shrinking, on the other, there is a lot of positive changes; the numerous votes cast for the president (76.69%) were in some way the result of the media consolidation. With a given selection of material and its interpretation, the authors’ position no longer sounds as an empty phrase from the text of the article: citizens of the Russian Federation mainly voted for V.V. Putin because it is with him that they associate the hashtag “stability;” the Russian Federation during V.V. Putin’s rule has demonstrated a more stable experience in the development of its political system in the post-Soviet space compared to a number of other political systems. In the background of such claims is the legalization of Putin’s rule and the recognition of its stability. But is such legalization an impeccable fact?

It is logical, therefore, that the authors of the article focused on the interpretation of the material and such expert assessments, that demonstrate the connection between the strategic tasks that V. Putin pronounced upon taking the office and those steps, actions, and acts that were outlined and undertaken. The article presents

three to five steps that in their nature are capable of mobilizing the society and the elite during the fourth term of presidency. Among such actions and steps are: the May Decree and proposal regarding the appointment of the Chairman of the Government, mass rotation of the heads of the Subjects of the Federation (governors) and proposals for plans of social and economic development. It is natural in this regard to ask yourself and the authors of the article how the ideological and political experts that group around the power structures of the state, on the one hand, appreciated and reacted to this design of the presidency, to this direct and clear presentation of the strategy of that presidential term, and on the other hand, examine the reaction of the groups and centers opposing the authorities.

You can find different criteria for evaluating both the experts themselves, and their views and level of understanding of the content, principles, and basic foundations of the fourth term of V. Putin's presidency. There are more or less accurate characteristics and rationales for problems and challenges that will determine both the style of the presidential rule and its key characteristics. Rather, there is a set of terms and epithets that determine the current and expected state of Putin's political regime. Let us list this set of definitions that the authors confidently and meticulously use in the article, drawing both the conditions and circumstances in which the political regime found itself at the given time: strong external pressure and a new crisis of the existing economic model; economic modernization and preparation of the state for the transfer of power and upbringing of a new set of managers. No matter how one evaluates and relates to the circle of ideas and judgments concerning the main and secondary characteristics of the fourth presidential rule of V. Putin, one can hardly deny the fact that it is a matter of changing the attitude of the population towards the political regime and towards President V. Putin. And this change, as the authors of the article show, confirmed by sociologists, lays the foundation for the downgrade of V.V. Putin's rating: "the population is demonstrating less trust in the head of state and it has become to worse treat the president."

The observed and recorded changes in this, as in all other areas, do not eliminate the main features of the incumbent political regime, the existing balance of forces and relationships in the structure of politics and state power. This explains the fundamental task of a conscious expert, scientist, specialist, a public figure or a statesman – to take into account these new changes, not to surrender helplessly to the emerging trend, which is gaining strength in flow and movement. The authors of the article formulate this thesis, if you will, in an academic language: "such calls need not only a timely and immediate response from the president, but also a kind of conceptualization." Subsequent reasoning does not add much to this statement. In it, the key place belongs to the idea of the need for "a kind of conceptualization" of both the institute of the presidency and the role of the President himself. And if we are talking about a kind of conceptualization of topics and issues, then we will express a number of judgments provoked by this acutely polemical article.

First, expert opinions, the experts used in this article, cannot and have not acted as politicians. They reacted and relate to the plots on a given topic as publicists, as a group of ideologically engaged intellectuals. They are sharp in language and condescending in their understanding of what a political regime and its active functionaries are, functionaries who operate in the harsh conditions of political confrontation with their adversaries and opponents, with an active or passive population capable of active actions under certain conditions.

Today, the topic of content and nature of the fourth presidential term of V.V. Putin as the President of the country and his future are widely discussed. The expert community of political scientists and active citizens of all views do not stint in the epithets, in the ways they express their vision of what the Putin regime is already like, what it is leaning to and into what it turns and will turn while responding to new challenges. You can talk about the fact that they write a lot on this topic. This is true and correct. But it is an exaggeration to say that many people think about it and discuss it soberly, that these processes and phenomena are well understood, that many people realize the role and importance of their subjects outside of their engagement in the political and ideological inclinations. This is precisely what is lacking.

Could we have been told something else, for example, by a typical researcher, historian and political scientist of Ukrainian origin, Alexander Motyl, a professor at Rutgers University (USA), when he, comparing Trump and Putin, asserts: “ They eagerly use fake news and they believe that the reality is what they say. What is even worse, both men have a strong paranoid trait. Trump in the first place sees the enemies at home and Putin first of all sees the enemies abroad. Both are also confident of their greatness: Trump regularly claims that he will be the greatest president from time immemorial. While Putin claims that he and Russia are one and the same.” What and how Motyl says and writes, of course, in his opinion, is the truth and a true reflection of reality. By attributing his picture of warped, false and deceptive perception to Trump and Putin, this professor transfers his reflection, his way of thinking to others, including the presidents. And in this way he forms an even more curved reflection and perception of the visible world. In there anything unknown added by his assertion that not the best times have come in Russia and President Vladimir Putin is to be blamed for everything. He adds: “behind the external power of Russia lies the collapse of the economic and political system.” Or that, if not so long ago, Putin was considered invulnerable, then today he and his whole system look frightened and exhausted, and that, according to Western experts, Russia is in a state of crisis and there are no positive changes. Motyl sees nothing strange in this logic of development of the Russian political and economic system. But then we are allowed to say that we, too, see nothing strange in the logic of Motyl’s judgment. It would be less strange if he wrote differently and tried to examine and analyze what is happening in the refraction of a new research optics. We would like to see in such judgments and

analysis the main thing – the novelty of the approach. Or at least what is required of anyone who takes up this topic is to treat Putin's regime honestly and professionally and also to his subject. But alas!

Doubts can be twofold. First, it's not worth to flavour political processes with moral and ethical categories, such as honesty. Politics and politicians are far from these substances. Give us and outline the ways of analysis through the recognition and advocacy of the interests of elites, social classes, political parties and leaders. Second, it is fashionable to speak and analyze the contemporary realities as a conflict of ideologies, in which neoliberalism is still good and worthy. And anything outside that ideology is populism. We still insist that it's appropriate to analyse the fourth term of V. Putin with application and on the basis of an honest attitude to the regime, processes and persons of this regime. Honest in the sense that if "pro-Putin" political analysts and experts do not recognize honestly possible, potential and real threats to the regime, and insist on their sinlessness, then it is very likely that the question of an honest and fair world order will be put up by the street and the "biomass."

Secondly, there are no strong grounds for stating at least in the tendency of professional analysis and transmission of quality images of vision and understanding of not only of the role of the institute of presidency in Russia, predetermined by traditions and constitutional norms. But there is still some lightness in judgments as to the differences between the actual institute of the presidency and the personal characteristics of its subjects. We still have to talk about the academic research in this regard. The article under review is an example and a pre-warning. Example and notification – as the topic is relevant and difficult in terms of the methodology, its conceptuality, according to the methods of analysis and cognition.

We talked about the fact that the fourth presidential term of V.V. Putin is something peculiar. What are the main elements of such peculiarity? V.V. Putin's politics for all periods of his rule shows us that the state system of the country has changed in one particular direction. Russia's political regime is unlike any previous regime: Putin's regime will not lose its popularity even if revenues from natural resources fall down; in order to defeat the extreme left and extreme right-wing forces in the country, in order to ease the external pressure, the Putin regime will have to compromise between the liberal and conservative ideologies; Putin's regime in the fourth term will be fueled by patriotic feelings and aspirations of the people to enhance Russia's prestige as a great power and resist the most radical sentiments of Russian patriots who consider Putin's regime too soft, too pragmatic, too moderate and even "weak" and "indecisive." It is possible that it is precisely during that term, that the presidency will resolve the dilemma in understanding the Putin regime as the basis of two components: the personal power of V. Putin himself and the growing role of consolidating democratic institutions in Russia in favor of the latter. The consolidation and strengthening of democratic

institutions in the country will be initiated and supported in the first place, and this is the main peculiarity of the regime, by V. Putin himself. But the risks of failing both because of the excessive centralization or because of the equally excessive liberalization will not be eliminated in this term either. This is a concern of the new generation of presidents and political regimes with a different content, changed in comparison with the current one.