
POLITICAL ISSUE 3(33), 2019
SCIENCE ISSUES
Academic journal

MOSCOW, 2019

POLITICAL SCIENCE ISSUES

Academic journal

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**ESTABLISHED BY LLC
"PUBLISHING HOUSE
"SCIENCE TODAY"**

The Journal is published with
the participation of the Institute
of modern policy of the Peoples'
Friendship University (RUDN)

The Journal is registered
by the Federal Service
for Supervision of Mass Media,
Communications and Protection
of Cultural Heritage

Reg. Number PI No.FS77–46176
of August 12, 2011
The Journal is published quarterly

The journal is included
in the database of the Russian
Science Citation Index

The Five-year Journal's
impact factor is 0,808

The Journal is included
in Ulrich's Periodicals Directory

Academic papers published
in the journal undergo obligatory
editorial checking.

The authors' opinion not always
coincides with the opinion
of the Editorial Board.

At reprint of the article or a part
of it the reference to the Journal
is obligatory.

Address of the editorial office:
10, Zagoryevskaya street, building 4,
office 4, Moscow, Russia, 115598
Tel: (910) 463-53-42
www.voprosopolitolog.ru,
www.souzpolitolog.ru
E-mail: voprosopolitolog@yandex.ru,
souzpolitolog@yandex.ru

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Signed for printing on 25.09.2019
Format 60x84/16. Offset paper.
Offset print.
Number of printed sheets
Circulation 500 copies.
Order 48105.

Printed at the LLC "PrintUP"
Nagorny drive, 12c1,
Moscow, Russia, 117105
Tel.: +7 (495) 925-00-06

ISSN 2225-8922 (print)

12 issues a year plus

4 issues a year of the translated (eng.) version

Languages: Russian and English

<http://voprosplitolog>

Included in the list of peer-reviewed scientific publications of the Higher Attestation Commission of the Russian Federation

Included in the Ulrich's Periodicals Directory

Materials of the journal are placed on the RSCI platform of the Russian scientific electronic library – Electronic Journals Library Cyberleninka

Subscription index of the journal in the Rospechat Agency catalogue is: 70035

Objectives and themes

Academic journal "Political Science Issues" is an international peer-reviewed scientific periodical in the field of political studies. The journal has an international character because of the composition of its Editorial Board, its editors, its contributing authors and topics of its publications.

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The journal strictly adheres to the international publishing standards and publication ethics identified in the COPE (*Committee on Publication Ethics*) document. <http://publicationethics.org>.

Full details of the journal and its editorial policy, requirements to the preparation and publication of articles, archive (issues since 2011) and additional information are available on the website: <http://voprosplitolog.ru>

E-mail address: voprosplitolog@yandex.ru

CONTENTS

POLITICAL PROCESS IN RUSSIA

- Boltenkova L.F., Alekhnovich S.O.** To the Question
of Continuity of the Russian Statehood 239
- Velikaya N.M.** Transformation of Local Self-Governance in Small
and Medium Cities of Russia Through the Eyes of the Expert Community 246
- Astvatsaturova M.A.** Ethnopolitical Notes from the Diary
of the North Caucasus Federal District 253

PROBLEMS OF EURASIAN AND POST-SOVIET COOPERATION

- Brusilovskiy D.A., Esipov I.I.** Two Worlds – Two Integrations:
The Specificity of Connection of Civilizations with Islamophobia..... 261
- Musaev O.R., Karshiev Sh.C.** Some Aspects of Strengthening International
Relations in Polyethnic States (On the Example of Uzbekistan)..... 272
- Shamarov P.V.** Russian Peacekeeping Model in the Post-Soviet Space 279

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND WORLD POLITICS

- Sardaryan G.T.** Reasons for the Crisis
of Christian Democracy in Western Europe..... 285
- Milka Malfait, Chernyavskiy S.I.** The Russia-EU Perspective:
National Security and Counterterrorism from a Different Angle..... 293
- Rustamova L.R.** Social and Humanitarian Cooperation
Between Russia and Germany in the Conditions Of Sanctions..... 304
- Dubrovina O.V., Salamov R.R.** Paradiplomacy
as a New Architecture of International Relations 311
- Haddad Mohannad** Strategies of Main Actors
of World Policy Regarding the Middle East and Modern Syria
(On the Example of the USA and the European Union)..... 316
- Jia Yuanpey** Experience, Prospects and Problems of Cooperation
Between China and Turkmenistan in the Field of Natural Gas 323
- Burda M.A., Horeva E.E., Larkina M.A., Belyaeva V.P.** National-State Identity
in Modern Europe in the Context of Migration and Political Processes..... 330
- Rodionova M.E.** Cooperation of Russia and Bulgaria:
from History to Modernity. Dynamics of Relations
in the Context of European Integration (On the 140th Anniversary
of Diplomatic Relations Between Russia and Bulgaria)..... 337

REVIEWS

- Slizovskiy D.E., Medvedev N.P.** Reflections on the Read 342

OUR AUTHORS..... 349

AUTHORS' GUIDELINES 351

TRANSFORMATION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE IN SMALL AND MEDIUM CITIES OF RUSSIA THROUGH THE EYES OF THE EXPERT COMMUNITY (4)

The article, based on the results of a comprehensive sociological study, examines the features of the evolution of local self-government in small and medium-sized cities of Russia during the recent reforms of local authorities related to the implementation of Federal Law No. 131, which was accompanied by changes in the organizational forms of local self-government, enlargement of municipalities, unification and transition to the model of “city manager”, and spread of the majority and mixed election system. The impact of these reforms on the effectiveness of managerial decisions and the attitude of the population to the local government is assessed. Special attention is paid to the analysis of expert interviews, which allow us to confirm the conclusion that the unification of local government models does not always meet the needs of local communities, and reform is often carried out in the interests of the regional political and managerial elite.

Key words: *local government, local authorities, municipality, small and medium-size cities.*

Local self-government is considered by modern science and political practice as the most important attribute of a modern democratic state, which has actualized the study of the features of its formation and development in Russia and remains relevant throughout the entire post-Soviet history of Russia. However, neither at the level of scientific discourse, nor in the political and managerial practice unified approaches to this level of power have been developed. This is due to the fact that in such a heterogeneous country as Russia, it is difficult to choose the optimal model of local self-government, which allows, on the one hand, to preserve the controllability of territories, and on the other, to ensure the most complete realization of citizens' rights to local self-government.

Considering local self-government as a specific organization of public authority and administration in a certain territory or in a settlement, the population

of which directly or through the bodies it creates, independently and responsibly solves issues of local importance on the basis of its own material and financial resources [3; 1; four; 6. P. 196], we intend in this article to analyze the latest changes in political and managerial practices in small and medium-size cities of Russia. Currently, about 27 million people live in them (7), and the small and medium-size cities form the basis of the urban settlement structure in the Russian Federation (5). This article is based on expert interviews (8), the main purpose of the interview was to identify the attitude of the expert community to the ongoing reform of local self-government and its impact on the quality of life of the population.

We will not dwell on the difficult history of the formation of self-government in modern Russia. This is pretty well covered in literature. We only note that it was precisely Russia's accession to the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1998 that required an activation of a number of administrative political reforms at the local level. Over the past 30 years, Russia has experienced at least 3 reforms of local self-government, which were determined primarily by the federal government, and not by local communities.

1. The period of liquidation of the Soviets (including local ones) after the coup of 1991 (1991-1995). At that time, in many regions of the Russian Federation local self-government did not actually exist and elections to local authorities were not held.

2. The period of initial restoration of local authority, creation of new organizational forms of local self-government and adaptation of a number of new procedures, such as elections to local authorities (1995-2003). Over the years, different models of local government were created in different regions of the Russian Federation as determined primarily by the different territorial foundations of local government [8].

3. The period of reform and unification of the LSG system (2003-2009), at that time an attempt was made to transfer public authority to the lower level, make it closer to the population and unify the organizational forms of LSGs so that they work in urban and rural communities. According to Law No. 131, two levels of local self-government were created: municipalities (urban and rural settlements) and municipal districts. A specific list of powers and sources of funding were assigned to each level. An important step was made at that time, political parties got an opportunity to participate in local elections, which generally positively affected the development of the party system.

4. The period of "counter-reform" (from 2010 to the present) associated with attempts to centralize power and reduce the powers of local self-government and its heads, manifested, inter alia, in reducing the number of municipalities where the head is elected by direct vote. Today, in accordance with Law No. 131, cities organize local government either as urban districts (independent municipalities that are not part of any other municipality), among them are: Totma, Severo-

baikalsk, Ust-Ilimsk, Pereslavl-Zalessky, Shuya, Sasovo, Derbent, Yelets, Kerch, Nakhodka; or as urban settlements within municipalities of a higher (district) level: Nerchinsk, Maysky, Elabuga, Kargopol, Konakovo, Korkino. Accordingly, there are some differences in the LSG model, in the role and status of various LSG officials.

In the course of our study, we analyzed the main features of the structure of local self-government in small and medium-sized cities, especially the elections to local authorities, the results of the reform in accordance with Law No. 131 and amendments to it. Unfortunately, the reforms of local self-government often resulted in a change in the external facade of organizational forms, without touching on fundamental issues related to budgeting, with the formation of a full-fledged tax base for LSGs.

The dependence of local authorities is determined by the practice of knocking out finances from higher budgets: *"If some issues are not resolved, then they go to the region, and there they raise their issues. Of course, it doesn't always work, there is no money at the higher level either, but they resolve some problems"* (Interview No. 2, Balashov).

One of the most important problems that local deputies themselves highlight is the mismatch between the powers and real capabilities of local authorities, the lack of their own tax base and, as a result, financial dependence on the higher level budgets. As one of the deputies of the Yekaterinburg City Duma noted: *"What is the regional government doing? It prefers to form the revenue side of local budgets by providing financial assistance. The share of gratuitous income in recent years has grown, reaching 62%. This means that the process of establishing the independence of municipalities is replaced by the relations of the giver and the applicant ... Even those municipalities that could feed themselves pay only their managerial staff and are not interested in developing their economic potential"*(3).

A significant institutional result of the reform consisted in a sharp increase in the number of municipalities and in the formation of a two-level model of local government. Not all urban settlements received the status of urban districts, which not only provides full autonomy from municipal areas, but also the concentration of revenue and expenditure powers in both urban settlements of both settlements and municipal areas. On the other hand, those cities that became part of municipal districts are faced with the situation when their priority for the year is the interests of municipal districts, especially when building relations with higher budgets. As a result, the total number of subsidized municipalities has increased.

According to experts, currently no more than 15% of local governments are able to finance at least some development. As for the majority of them, out of almost 40 powers of local authority, they have enough funds to execute seven to eight *"... our municipality will always be in the role of an applicant. Relations are initially unequal Everything depends by and large on the availability of*

money from the Moscow Oblast. The more money MO has, the better it lives, the happier is the city's population. It all depends on relations with the republic, in the sense that the less is taken away, the better. They either cut off the money for the roads or dig out half of them and then stop for the lack of money." (Interview No. 3, Severobaykalsk).

Given the lack of money, the local authorities are delegating more and more powers to the region and finally lose interest in developing production or business and increasing the number of jobs in its territory. *"Funds of municipalities flow into the budgets of higher levels, and then return to the same municipalities as inter-budget transfers. This is illogical and inefficient. Reliable tax sources should be assigned to local budgets, encouraging municipalities to work on their own revenue base."*(1).

In general, most experts adhere to the pessimistic point of view that, despite a formal increase in powers, no real capacity was added to the powers of the local authorities.

Many urban settlements faced big problems after the release of the well-known Presidential May Decrees [7], according to which the obligation was established to bring the minimum wage for workers of cultural institutions to the average level in the region. Regional authorities everywhere obliged local self-government bodies to increase accordingly the wages of employees of municipal institutions.

According to the overwhelming majority of experts, local governments have not yet become a full-fledged institutions in the system of government: *"It is difficult for municipalities to breathe, they are very dependent on higher authorities"* (Interview № 4, Sovetsk). More than half of the experts point out to the unsatisfactory and formal nature of the interaction between the regional and municipal levels of government: *"there is a bit of bureaucratic confusion, that is an endless correspondence with no outcome."* (Interview № 4, Severobaikalsk).

In particular, attention is drawn to the fact that local government *"is now fully regulated by the executive branch of the region"* (Interview № 3, Shuya), and *"they are built on the command principle, so all issues are resolved not at the local level, but at a higher regional or federal levels."* (Interview № 2, Shuya).

A controversial issue is the choice of a model for organizing local authorities. Law No. 131-FZ provides for three options: 1) the "mayor-council" scheme; 2) the scheme of the "city manager" with the choice of the mayor from among the deputies of the Council; 3) a "mixed" scheme, when city manager (head of administration) is appointed and the mayor (head of the city) is elected by popular vote. Starting from 2010-2011, there was a massive rejection by municipalities of mayoral elections, both in regional capitals and in cities of regional subordination.

At the same time, the institute of a city manager repeatedly failed. For example, in the Komi Republic (where already in 2011 such a model existed in 13 municipalities, and subsequently a widespread transition to it was carried out), in recent years, several heads of administrations and regions who have been elected

on a competitive basis by deputies were convicted for the abuse of authority and economic crimes (6).

We note, that the new amendments to the current legislation made the main subject of decision-making regarding the choice of the LSG model not the LSG bodies as before, but the regional authorities, which suggests that in the near future all regions will refuse to elect mayors. Of the cities in our sample, a model with a city manager exists in 13 cities: Shuya, Pyatigorsk, Nerchinsk, Nakhodka, Maysky, Konakovo, Kerch, Zheleznogorsk, Elabuga, Derbent, Vorkuta, Velikiye Luki, Balashov.

In a model that uses the institute of city manager, the main drawback is not so much the dependence of the hired manager on the City Duma and the mayor who conclude a contract with him, which is often mentioned in textbooks. Rather, it is a lack of accountability to the public, as it is often possible to make a deal with obedient deputies subsequently leading to flagrant violations of the law, corruption and embezzlement of budget funds.

Our studies show that the appointment of the head of the local administration is opposed to the principle of independence of local authorities, since in the municipal district (urban district), intra-city municipality, one third of the members of the Competition Commission are appointed by regional government bodies. The chairman and deputies of the representative body lose their real authority in connection with the transfer of control levers to the city manager, who exercises executive and administrative powers. This imbalance is often visible even on the sites of municipalities, as the sites of the administration, as a rule, are more complete, have real-time feedback from voters, etc., and the page of the Duma is often posted on the website of the city administration.

The practice of the actual appointment of the city manager in the presence of supporters of the governor in city parliaments provides for some predictability and accountability of heads of administrations to the higher level authorities. We can say that the federal and regional legislators have the opinion that the local administration should be state-controlled. Moreover, it is obvious that the heads of the local administrations who do not go through the election procedure cannot fully feel the full burden of responsibility to the population and are accountable, primarily to the employer, that is, to the representative body.

There is no doubt that the new model reduces the ability of the population to influence urban politics, and launches the process of governmentalization of local authorities in Russia, which is largely facilitated by the transition to a mixed and majority system of elections to the city legislative bodies.

It should be noted that the reforms of local self-government bodies are connected not only and not so much with a change in the organizational or territorial foundations of the LSG system, but also with the scope of their powers, with the features of budget formation and spending, with the ability to conduct independent economic, social and cultural policies in the cities. At the same time, due to

a shortage of funds, the newly emerged municipalities were not able to fulfill the law requirement on the assignment to them of certain municipal property. As a result, in a number of subjects of the Russian Federation, the reverse process began aimed at unification of municipalities (in Perm and Krasnoyarsk Territories, Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Astrakhan, Vologda, Kostroma and other regions).

Constant reforms of local self-government, inconsistency of actions of regional and local authorities and contradictions in legislative regulation negatively affect the quality of power and the fulfillment by local authorities of their social obligations to the population.

In today Russian conditions, the efficiency of municipal management can be raised through the improvement of the legislative base and expansion of revenues of the local government budgets and also through further expansion of civic participation in the resolution of problems of local importance: each citizen should have broad legal and organizational capabilities for expressing and defending his position. There must be an effective system of public control from below.

NOTES:

(1) Interview with a deputy of the Bryansk City Council. The study “LSG Deputies on the problems of local government reform in the regions.” 2016. Author’s archive.

(2) Interview with the head of the Yaroslavl city settlement, Primorsky Territory. The study “LSG Deputies on the problems of local government reform in the regions.” 2016. Author’s archive.

(3) Noritsin, Alexander Nikolaevich, deputy of the Yekaterinburg City Council of the Sverdlovsk Region. The study “LSG Deputies on the problems of local government reform in the regions.” Author’s archive.

(4) When implementing the project, state support funds were used, allocated as a grant in accordance with the order of the President of the Russian Federation dated January 17, 2014 No. 11-rp and on the basis of a competition held by the ISEPS Foundation. The project was implemented from January to September 2015 and included three complementary (quantitative and qualitative) studies: *desk research, media content analysis, and expert interviews*. The geography of the study covered small and medium-sized cities from all federal districts of the Russian Federation.

(5) Today, there are 790 small and 155 medium-size cities in the country.

(6) Among them: former city managers Vorkuta (Anatoly Puro), Ukhta (Oleg Kazartsev), Pechory (Vasily Torlopov), Knyazhpogostsky district (Victor Popov); Syktyvkar (Roman Zenishchev), Verkhoturys (Sergey Lobusov), Novomoskovsk, Miass, Ozersk (Evgeny Tarasov, Alexandrovsk, Perm Territory (A. Migashkin), Mirny, Arkhangelsk Region (O. Smirnov). Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky (A. Alekseev), Verkhoturys, Sverdlovsk Region (Sergey Lobusov and Vladislav Fakhrislamov); Saratov (A. Prokopenko), Arzamas (I. Kiselev), Elista (O. Nokhashiev), Yevpatoria (A. Filonov).

(7) Resident population as of January 1, 2015. Official site of the Federal State Statistics Service // <http://www.gks.ru/opendata/dataset/7708234640-ca-08-002>.

(8) Expert interviews were conducted in the cities of Balashov (Saratov Region), Velikiye Luki (Pskov Region), Elabuga (Republic of Tatarstan), Lysva (Perm Territory), Nerchinsk (Zabaykalsky Territory, Chita Region), Novouralsk (Sverdlovsk Region), Pereslavl-Zalessky (Yaroslavl region), Severobaykalsk (Republic of Buryatia), Sovetsk (Kaliningrad region), Shuya (Ivanovo region). The experts included specialists participating in the activities of local governments: representatives of local authorities, parties and public organizations, initiative groups of citizens. A total of 60 respondents were interviewed by 6 experts in each city.

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