

THE CHALLENGE OF PREVENTING DEPOLITISATION

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Russia is currently experiencing a quite difficult period in terms of its relationships between the elite and the larger society. Hopefully, it is yet neither a split nor a crisis that will lead to a split. This situation, in which the trust in the elites has been exhausted and the resultant feedback from society is lost by them, continues to reoccur and has already done so on a regular basis in our history for the past two decades at minimum. But every time this happens – whether it be in 1993, 1996 or 1999 – there were healthy forces in the Russian establishment, weighed down by many shortcomings and sins, which offered a hand to the respectable majority of the Russian public, which were uninterested in shocks, splits, and revolutions.

The latest counter-revolution movement of this kind, which effectively united the people and the majority of the elite, was Vladimir Putin's coming to power in 1999-2000. But as soon as the

power image was renewed, a few unexpected faces were shown, and the discourse of power toward the people was made more vivid and human, the interest in maintaining stability allowed for the rapid consolidation of society and led it to a level of development which is generally still taking place at this time.

People have, to some extent, become used to this stability, and it is no longer treated as a basic and absolute value. Moreover, **in some cases, stability is rather seen as a synonym for stagnation and the unwanted maintenance of the status quo. The need for change has penetrated all strata of the society and the elite as well, by the way.** As President Medvedev stated not very long ago, and this also applies to all elite groups, there exists a certain 'rigidity of mind'. The rigid power is sometimes unable to react to the quite evident and actual demands of the society. At the same time, the rigid opposition is unable to lay distinct claims to power on behalf of the society, and it goes on using the same clichés which have actually not been accepted by the society.

It cannot be said that the margin of safety of the system has been exhausted, while it has not actually even taken shape yet. There are no stable landmarks in terms of values. There is no ideological stratification or no stable opinions, being put forward by different political parties, for instance. Over the past decade, during the formation of the one-and-a-half-party system, United Russia has largely been turned into a prototype of a real political party. It finds support not only in the bureaucracy but also in the active majority who votes for it. It is another matter that the construc-

tion of this institution started in the early 2000s from the bottom down and today, it is only just sprouting into the foundation. We are dealing with a situation when the United Russia, on the one hand, looks more and more like a real political party, while, on the other hand, no real party has emerged near it. And the remaining question is whether an imitation political structure can indeed be replaced by a real political one, or whether it will collapse, effectively leaving the place unoccupied. The only way out for our elite is to prevent society from experiencing real depolitisation.

The nihilistic sentiments that emerge from time to time are really starting to take on a form that rejects the system on the whole and specifically, the party system. The prototype of that can be seen in the well-known slogan, adopted by mineworkers in the Kuzbass region in 1998 when they blocked the railways; it is 'All bosses are rascals'. The refusal of the majority of the population to trust the political system, the party system, and democratic institutions represents a great threat. The authorities' concern, in general, is to prevent public trust in party-based political institutions from being lost. As the Communist Party of the Soviet Union once stated in its time, it was the initiator and warrantor of the perestroika. Today, the only way out for the United Russia is to become the initiator and warrantor of certain modernising and reformation-based transformations, including those that must occur inside the party, in order to lead the process of fighting for public trust in the political system of the country. ■

Exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum