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Announced in 2018, V. Putin’s “Decisive Breakthrough” is Now Stuck



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Abstract. Over the last 10 years, the journal “Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast” has been presenting articles on relevant problems of Russian society and government in its “Editorial” section once in every two months. Based on expert opinions of a wide range of scientists, sociologists, economists, political and social activists, and a set of factual data, acquired using sociological and statistical tools, a long-term monitoring of the public administration efficiency has been conducted, which allowed assessing the current situation in the country in real time. In Editor-in-Chief’s previous article, published in the journal “Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast” no.4, we focused on the results of the all-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, held on July 1, 2020. Amended Constitution significantly strengthens social obligations of the government, and it is

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aimed at the protection of Russia's national interests. Besides, the nature of the new Constitution turned out to be relevant in terms of civilizational challenges, because common practice of border shutdowns during COVID-19 epidemic forms new outlines of the world order that strengthen a value of national interests and weaken globalization values, which have been dominant over the last 50 years. Nevertheless, many experts noted after the all-Russian vote that the consolidation of society around constitutional amendments did not work out. The results of our analysis, conducted according to data of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, showed that the share of people, who voted against amendments, exceeded average national numbers in 47 Russian regions out of 86; it was even higher in some oblast centers. Its main reason is people's disbelief in a desire and abilities of the ruling elites to implement election promises of the President. This situation is primarily caused by a lack of noticeable positive changes in the dynamics of the level and quality of life in the last ten years. In order to enhance this topic, we decided to analyze some key aspects of the whole process of the formation of the new post-Soviet statehood. The President himself initiated and publically announced this reform back in 1999, and he has been controlling its implementation ever since.

Key words: historical process, national interests, efficiency of public administration, presidential elections, Constitution of the Russian Federation, public opinion.

Even before 2000, when V.V. Putin first became the President, he had written that “communism vividly demonstrated its inaptitude for sound self-development, dooming our country to a steady lag behind economically advanced countries... Where there is a state ideology blessed and supported by the state, there is, strictly speaking, practically no room for intellectual and spiritual freedom, ideological pluralism and freedom of the press, that is, for political freedom. I am against the restoration of an official state ideology in Russia in any form”¹.

This idea runs through a whole relatively recent history of the formation and development of the young post-Soviet state, and it will probably not stop in the upcoming decades. Thus, one of the main points of the RF Constitution of 1993 – “In the Russian Federation ideological diversity shall be

recognized. No ideology may be established as state or obligatory one” – remained unchanged in the new edition of the country's fundamental document which entered into force after the all-Russian vote on July 1, 2020. Today, during the chaotic destruction of customary norms and values, which inevitably follows the process of the transition from modern to postmodern, many experts consider the “de-ideologized and pragmatic” nature of Russia's policy one of its main geopolitical advantages.

The de-ideologization involves non-intrusion of its value system into other countries in foreign policy and provision of its own citizens with the amplest possible opportunities for self-realization in domestic policy: it is a principle position and distinctive feature of post-Soviet Russia, though many experts disagree with this and believe that “the absence of ideology is the same as a lack of purpose”².

¹ Putin V.V. Russia at the Turn of the Millennium. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html

² See, for example: Sulakshin S.S. *Quality and Success of Public Policies and Administration*. Series “Political axiology”. Moscow: Nauchny Ekspert, 2012; Starikov N. V. Russia must formulate a national idea. *N. Starikov's official blog*. June 21, 2019. Available at: <https://nstarikov.ru/starikov-rossiya-dolzha-sformulirovat-natsionalnuyu-ideyu-104991>

Excerpt from the report of NRU HSE, prepared according to the results of the situation analysis under the auspices of the Russian MFA with the support of the Committee on International Affairs of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and the International Public Fund "Russian Peace Foundation", the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy and the journal "Russia in Global Affairs": "We do not suggest that Russia adopts a particular state ideology in a classical understanding, which implies the development of "only correct" views on historical development and claims the truth and universality of the value system, as well as the imposition of views and values on everyone else. We and the world had enough of such ideologies in the 20th century. Now we see a predictable collapse of another the "only correct" ideology – "liberal democracy". **The beneficial difference between Russia's foreign policy is its de-ideologized and pragmatic nature**"³.

"The USSR is the example of defeat due to the death of grand ideas, where the communist ideology, uniting the country, weakened and degenerated in the 1970s–1980s. The current case – EU Europe. It rejected national ideas of great states, and this decision made them mediocre ones (only France tries to cling to the previous status); it named European peace a purpose and achieved it (but mostly due to assistance of the USSR/Russia and the USA with their nuclear weapons), and now it slowly slides down. The EU had a chance for a grand new idea — to create a space of security and cooperation from Lisbon to Vladivostok, combining Europe's technology and finance with Russia's resources, human capital, and strategic power. But it refused such project"⁴.

At the same time, the absence of ideology does not mean that grand ideas are not in demand (for Russian society and Russia as a whole, as an active subject of the multipolar world). On the contrary, a whole Russian history over the last 100 years has been going on under this sign, whether it was the construction of communism, the defense of the Motherland from foreign invaders, space exploration, or socialist slogans of Soviet "five-year plans".

It was the weakening of a grand idea to build communism in minds and hearts of people that became one of the main reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union, since the factor of external interference and betrayal of the elites at that crucial historical moment would hardly have

mattered if it had not been for the tacit consent of the majority of Soviet citizens tired of the "iron curtain".

Today, many experts note that global projects of "Western liberalism" and "United Europe" go down the same path, when the values of national sovereignty are still preserved despite active globalization processes. At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic and common shutdowns of state borders in order to prevent its spread have significantly increased the importance of national interests not only in Europe but in the whole world.

From the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 until now, the history of post-Soviet Russia can be seen as the succession of grand ideas – even despite pronounced de-ideologization.

³ S.A. Karaganov, D.V. Suslov, et al. *Protecting Peace, Earth, and Freedom of Choice for All Countries: New Ideas for Russia's Foreign Policy*: speech at XXI April International Academic Conference on Economic and Social Development, Moscow, 2020; Nat. Res. Un. "Higher School of Economics". Moscow: HSE Publishing House, 2020. P. 36.

⁴ S.A. Karaganov, D.V. Suslov, et al. *Protecting Peace, Earth, and Freedom of Choice for All Countries: New Ideas for Russia's Foreign Policy*: speech at XXI April International Academic Conference on Economic and Social Development, Moscow, 2020; Nat. Res. Un. "Higher School of Economics". Moscow: HSE Publishing House, 2020. P. 33.

1. 1991–1999

During the “wild 90s”, it was an idea of Russia’s entrance in the coordinate system of global “Western project”. This entrance should have been not just political and economic but mental and spiritual, manifesting itself in each citizen of our country. According to the plan of the “collective West” and the liberal elites who gained power after the final collapse of one of the greatest countries – the Soviet Union, Russia should have become a periphery territory, completely controlled by liberal values of the western world, implementing “the economy of services”, the meaning of which

“Esteemed citizens of Russia, dear friends! **I am addressing you today, you specifically**, because you have entrusted me with the highest government post in the country. I understand that I have taken on a great responsibility, and I know that **in Russia the head of state has always been and will always be the person who is responsible for everything in the country...**

We must guard what we have gained, we must protect and promote democracy, we must make sure that the authorities elected by the people serve the people’s interests, protect Russian citizens everywhere – both inside and outside the country – and serve the public. **This is a principled, staunch position that I have defended and will continue to defend...**

I can assure you that my work will be guided solely by **the interests of the state**. Perhaps it will not be possible to avoid mistakes, but what I can promise and what I do promise is that I will work openly and honestly.

I consider it to be my sacred duty to unify the people of Russia, **to rally citizens around clear aims and tasks**, and to remember every day and every minute that we have one Motherland, one people and one future”⁶.

is not the production of industrial products but the provision of services on its basis despite its place and manufacturer⁵. Perhaps, this would have happened if the greed of Russia’s own elites did not lead the country to the economic catastrophe, which was a collapse of then in-demand liberal values of freedom, democracy, market, and it caused the emergence of a new grand idea in society – a strong centralized state power capable of restoring order in the country and stabilizing the rapidly declining economy

2. 2000–2007

In 2000, V. Putin “brought” this idea with him. He started his first speech as the President with addressing people and taking full responsibility for the situation in Russia. Later, thanks to his personal efforts, the President was able to settle the “Chechen conflict”, fight back the oligarchs who continued to plunder the national wealth, and, most importantly, establish a direct personal contact with the society.

Coming back to the first program article of the future President of the RF (when he

“I am convinced that ensuring the necessary growth dynamics is not only an economic problem. It is also a political and, in a certain sense, – I am not afraid to use this word – ideological problem. To be more precise, it is an ideological, spiritual and moral problem. It seems to me that the latter is of particular importance at the current stage from the standpoint of ensuring the unity of Russian society. Fruitful and creative work which our country needs so badly today is impossible in a split and internally disintegrated society, a society where the main social sections and political forces have different basic values and fundamental ideological orientations”⁷.

⁵ Betelin V.V. Russia needs to abandon the “service economy” and move to the economy of industrial production. *Ekonomist*, 2019, no. 2, p. 4.

⁶ V.V. Putin’s speech at the Inauguration Ceremony on May 7, 2000. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21410>

⁷ Putin V.V. Russia at the Turn of the Millennium. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html

pronounced his clear position on the impossibility of establishing an official state ideology in Russia), we would like to note that, in it, V. Putin noted a necessity of an ideological approach for solving economic problems, and at that time he called the “Russian idea” one of three columns of the new state system model, which he aimed to develop as the President and the role of national leader.

In the mid-2000s, when the middle class and civil society strengthened in Russia, a natural need for a new (more precisely, the next) grand idea emerged – Russia’s positioning as an independent state in the international arena.

3. 2008–2012

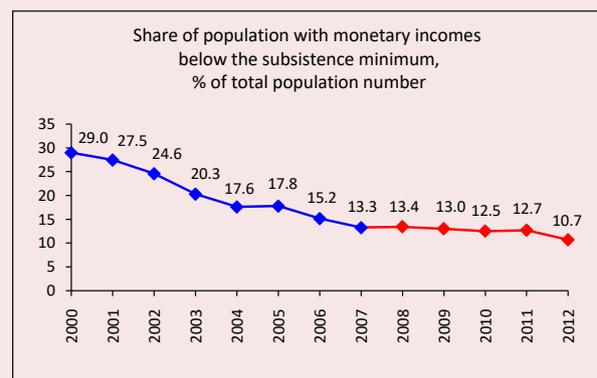
V. Putin formulated this idea at the Munich Conference on Security Policy on Security Policy in 2007, when the Russian President was the first among the world leaders who started to talk about the threats of a unipolar world, the inevitability of its multipolar structure, and Russia’s place in it as a rightful, sovereign partner.

After it, in 2008, constitutional obligations made V. Putin leave the position of the RF President. While this post was occupied by D.A. Medvedev, new grand ideas did not emerge in Russia, and there were no signs of them. On the contrary, this period was transitional and the most vulnerable for building the Russian statehood, and it was when the country fully faced the financial crisis and economic stagnation. “Collective West” powers had all the opportunities to take advantage of the historical moment and, possibly, completely stop the process of new Russia’s rebirth from the wreckage of the USSR, started by V. Putin.

Russian society’s experience with another (the third in the last 10 years) economic crisis

“However, what is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making. It is world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.

I consider that **the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today’s world... the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization.** Along with this, what is happening in today’s world – and we just started to discuss this – is a tentative to introduce precisely this concept into international affairs, the concept of a unipolar world⁸.



caused a need to form a new grand idea. It would not be related to economic issues or the level and quality of life. It would be deeper, capable of uniting and consolidating Russian society, which started to feel disappointment with the efficiency of the state administration system, headed by D. Medvedev, and Russia’s chances to have a bright future with the ongoing decline of population’s income and key development indicators.

⁸ V. Putin’s speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy on February 10, 2007. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

4. 2013–2017

Such idea was the rebirth of spiritual and mental foundations of Russian identity. It was a beginning of V. Putin's third presidential term, and he addressed the whole world and Russians at the Valdai International Discussion Club in 2013.

“For us (and I am talking about Russians and Russia), questions about who we are and who we want to be are increasingly prominent in our society. We have left behind Soviet ideology, and there will be no return. Proponents of fundamental conservatism who idealize pre-1917 Russia seem to be similarly far from reality, as are supporters of an extreme, western-style liberalism. It is evident that it is impossible to move forward without spiritual, cultural and national self-determination. Without this we will not be able to withstand internal and neither external challenges, nor we will succeed in global competitions”⁹.

Without a doubt, a key “emotional point” in the implementation of this idea were events of the “Crimean Spring” which finally formed the borders of the currently existing socio-political (some experts call it “Putinskiy”) consensus¹⁰. Simultaneously developing MIC, which has been controlled by V. Putin since the beginning, allowed “catching up” on an opportunity of implementing the grand idea of the previous

stage (“Russia’s positioning in the world”), which was missed in 2008–2012. Russia’s participation in the “Syrian campaign” clearly showed it.

The feature of the studied period of the Russian history (2013–2017) is a certain temporary failure between the official declaration of a grand idea and its implementation. Before it, each grand idea gradually went through three development stages: maturation in the form of a wide necessity in Russian society, official wording in a public rhetoric of the President, and, finally, the implementation which is reflected in a gradual growth of a new necessity and grand idea in society.

However, in 2013–2017, V. Putin had to implement two grand ideas at once: to consolidate Russian society on the basis of traditional spiritual and moral values and to protect Russia’s sovereignty in the international arena, which was not finished mostly due to “missed” presidential term in 2008–2012. Despite the fact that Russia managed to avoid the most pessimistic turn of events in 2008–2012 (run for office and possible second presidential term of D. Medvedev with the assistance of the “collective West” powers), **the interruption of a sequence** of V. Putin’s presidential terms (who, let us remind, did not

⁹ V. Putin’s speech at the meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club. September 19, 2013. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19243>

¹⁰ Kulikov D.E.: “The President’s foreign policy position, reunification with Crimea, attitude to the rebellious Donbass, and categorical rejection of any revolutionary scenarios for changing power within the country **formed a new social organism which today is called the “Crimean consensus” or “Putinsky consensus”**. According to various sociological services, depending on the methods of research and emphasis in questionnaires, the social base of this consensus is from 85 to 95% of the country’s citizens. The unity of this consensus is constantly being strengthened as a result of public reflection and increased understanding of the essence of the geopolitical and historical situation. This situation consists in the fact that Russia today is a part of the world that has rebelled against the global superpower. Russia refused to submit to the United States being the world hegemon and representative of the interests of the domination of the Western super-society. **This confrontation is a fundamental and historical one.** Either we will be crushed, Russia will not exist, and the world will be subordinated to the global superpower of Westernism for decades, or we will be able to defend our right to exist, to our civilizational essence, and thus to the fundamental possibility of a so-called multipolar world that preserves cultural and civilizational diversity as the most important resource for development for all mankind.

Within the “Crimean consensus”, we have something to argue about and we should argue about it ... **But it is also quite obvious that only members of the “Crimean consensus” can become participants in the new policy.** Those few who do not agree with reunification with Crimea, do not support the Donbass, who are ready to surrender to global hegemon and apply to themselves the rule “Woe to the vanquished”, who do not refuse riots and revolutions as means of seizing power – they cannot be participants of the new Russian policy. They do not have “a ticket” to the Russian political class”.

disappear from public policy in 2008–2012 and was a prime minister – the second most important person in the government) did not go unnoticed.

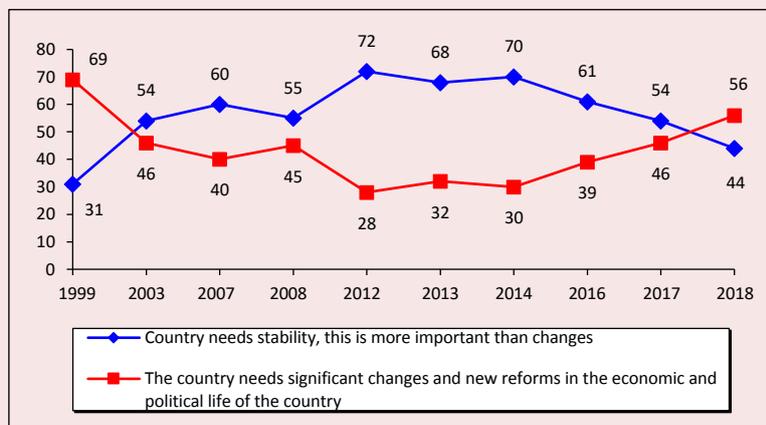
Let us note one more important factor: **the change of key political events in that period was not natural, and it was exactly natural unforced nature of grand idea's "life cycle" and its gradual transition from one stage to another which provided its efficient implementation and simultaneous development of the whole process of the Russian statehood formation.**

Events of 2013–2017 were primarily dictated by Russia's relationship with the "collective West" which became tense after the return of V. Putin's to the presidential position in 2012. It implied the continuation of the course announced by him at the Munich conference in 2007. It was not a plan of "collective West"

who tried their best to keep D. Medvedev "at the wheel" of the Russian government as a person of more liberal views¹¹. It caused rapid and chaotic monthly change of the public agenda: "the Valdai Forum", "Ukrainian crisis", "Crimean spring", economic crisis of 2014–2015, later – the US economic sanctions, "Syrian conflict", doping scandals...

It primarily caused the new necessity, which later became another grand idea, to form **unnaturally early** – in 2014, when sociologists recorded a steady growth of a number of Russians not satisfied with the public rhetoric of officials aimed at the preservation of stability¹², and they stated that "there is a growing understanding that the country may not be able to move forward without a major reassessment of strategies and priorities which were efficient in the previous relatively successful decade"¹³.

Dynamics of orientations of Russians toward stability and changes, % of a number of respondents



Source: Petukhov V.V. Dynamics of social attitudes of Russians and the formation of a request for change. *Socis*, 2018, no. 11, p. 42.

¹¹ For reference: "The President D. Medvedev will meet the US vice-president Joseph Biden in Kremlin on March 9. Biden's visit demonstrates support of the West for D. Medvedev's potential second run for the office...It is also assumed that V. Putin – the head of government – if he does not go to the elections in 2012, may be offered the chair of the International Olympic Committee – one of the largest and most respected organizations in the world of sports" (Source: Konovalova E., Aleksandrov O. Will Joe Biden try to dissuade Vladimir Putin from running for presidency in 2012? *The Moscow Post*, dated March 4, 2011. Available at: <http://www.moscow-post.ru/politics/000129922924180/>).

¹² Petukhov V.V. Dynamics of social attitudes of Russians and the formation of a request for change. *Socis*, 2018, no. 11, p. 43.

¹³ *Russian Society after the 2018 Presidential Election: a Request for Changes: Information and Analytical Summary*. FNISTS RAN. Moscow, 2018. P. 7.

Thus, in Russian society, for the first time since V. Putin's presidential terms, a need for development and renewal of the economy, policy, new politicians, new living standards emerged and started to gain more power. It led to the necessity to formulate a new grand idea.

Therefore, the failure occurred exactly at the historical stage of 2013–2017 during the sequential implementation of a big way of constructing the new Russian statehood, which the President started in 1999 together with the country. It happened partially because V. Putin had to put double efforts due to “missed” presidential term, partially – due to strained relations with the collective West, partially – due to a very early, unnatural maturation of the necessity for changes in society, which was primarily caused by the euphoric nature of the “Crimean spring”.

5. 2018 – now

The new grand idea was formulated by V. Putin during his Address to the Federal Assembly in March 1, 2018. It was an idea of a “decisive breakthrough” in areas of society's utmost concern. This development should have been exactly “decisive” as a respond of the government to the degree of the existing need for changes in society.

As always clear and aimed at the future, understandable for most population, and uniting supporters of any political views, the wording of the new grand idea was the reason why V. Putin received the highest support of

“Therefore, everything hinges on efforts to preserve the people of Russia and to guarantee the prosperity of our citizens. We must achieve a decisive breakthrough in this area”¹⁴.

¹⁴ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly. March 1, 2018. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

¹⁵ Surkov V. Yu. Vladimir Putin's long state. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2019, February 11. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html

voters (76.69%, or 56 mil. people) in the history of elections of the President of the Russian Federation during the latest presidential elections on March 18, 2018. A year later, V. Surkov's article about the deep state emerged in media. The author raised the relations between Russian society and V. Putin personally in the rank of the concept: the one where “confidential communication and interaction of the supreme ruler with citizens”¹⁵ would be the main core of post-Soviet Russia; the instrument that would allow it to overcome all current and future historical challenges.

Number and share of votes cast
for V.V. Putin during the Presidential election
in 2012 and 2018, total in Russia

Indicator	Presidential election		Change, 2018 to 2012
	March 4, 2012	March 18, 2018	
mil. people	45.6	56.4	+ 10.8
% of turnout	63.60	76.69	+ 13.09

However, the implementation of V. Putin's latest grand idea – the “decisive breakthrough” in people preservation and citizens' well-being – have not yet started. Its main reason is an unresolved dilemma of the liberal-patriotic way in the system of public administration, which has become a permanent attribute of post-Soviet Russia

Since the beginning of his presidential terms, V. Putin had to place stake not on the nationalization of the elites thoroughly imbued with liberal values, who gained power in the 1990s, but on their “manual operation”. Nevertheless, the objective process of globalization blurred the borders between states, made the world a single one, and the historical process of Russia's recovery after the collapse of the USSR could not happen without attention and corresponding opposition from

the “collective West”. The President himself has always been surrounded by people (inside the country and in the international political arena) who supported liberal views opposed to the national development course he pursued, and these people also could not be ignored.

The focus on “manual operation” of the state system, where V. Putin created for himself the status of an arbiter who monitors the balance of interests of various groups, clans, and families, has been working for a long time –

“Every Western war for global hegemony since the Time of Troubles four centuries ago has always been directed against Russia. Subjectively, the US elite is focused on the usual logic of inciting war against Russia **as the largest country not under its control...** The ruling elite of the United States seeks to destroy the Russian identity and turn Russia **into a colonially controlled territory.**

Our offshore oligarchy is ready to capitulate in order to preserve the capital exported from Russia... It is not surprising that our economy has become a raw material economy – **the Western world needs nothing from us except natural resources.** This is because the ruble is essentially a surrogate mechanism for its creation – financing the growth of the Russian economy is allowed only to the extent of its increased contributions to the provision of raw materials and assets to the US and EU. Our monetary authorities continue to rely on the instructions of Washington financial organizations at the expense of the country's interests”¹⁶. “Over the last three years, the damage caused by the activities of the monetary authorities has reached nearly 20 trillion rubles of under-produced products and more than 10 trillion rubles of undelivered investments. Although population really feels it in the form of declining real incomes for the fourth year in a row and increasing poverty”¹⁷.

almost 18 years. He managed to complete nearly all set goals in this period. **However, when the Russian society's necessity, as well as another grand idea formed by it, touched upon the only thing that always attracted “collective West” in Russia – resources, capitals – then the process of the consistent implementation of grand ideas in our country has slowed down.**

The “life cycle” of the decisive breakthrough idea included the first stage (society's necessity, formed in 2014). There was the second stage – an official wording at the state level (Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly in 2018) after which the society's necessity becomes a priority in the national development course at this historical time interval. However, the third stage – practical implementation of the pronounced course – never happened.

Instead, many experts in 2018–2019 began to note signs that “the elites feel the beginning of the end and try to snatch as

“Domestic officials are less afraid of public scandals and more often show contempt for public opinion. People respond to this with distrust to almost all state institutions and even their own elected representatives”¹⁸.

“People suddenly felt that everything was happening like in a banal well-known saying: “If you do not get into politics, it will get into you”. This is a rather vulgar statement, but it accurately shows what is happening now. Politics came to literally every home and every family, because the authorities and government officials were mad with impunity. Over the past few years, any of their decisions and initiatives, even the most ridiculous ones, have passed – they have gotten away with everything”¹⁹.

¹⁶ Glaz'ev S.Yu. We've been retreating for too long. *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 2018, no. 21. Available at: <https://lgz.ru/article/-21-6645-30-05-2018/my-slishkom-dolgo-otstupali-/>

¹⁷ USA needs Russia's resources, and the war is inevitable (S.Yu. Glaz'ev's interview). *Gradator information resource*. May 16, 2018. Available at: <https://gradator.ru/news/economy/2167.html>

¹⁸ The Russian bureaucracy goes unhinged, turning into “heaven-dwellers”. Who needs it? *Russkoe agentstvo novostey*. 2018. December 27. Available at: <http://ru-an.info/>

¹⁹ Trapeznikov P. The Russian government is stunned by impunity...(materials of an interview with the director of the Institute of globalization and social movements B. Kagarlitsky). *Literature portal “Izba-chital'na”*, July 11, 2018. Available at: <https://www.chitalnya.ru/work/2314863/>

much as possible while they still have time”. At the regional level, cases of corruption scandals, boorish attitude and, to put it mildly, careless statements of public authorities in relation to people became more common. At the federal level, the implementation of national projects “froze” (they had to be postponed until 2030²⁰), ideologists of the pension reform appeared from somewhere²¹ (though many economists showed exact calculations proving that there was no need for changing the pension legislation and another mechanisms and instruments are necessary for the implementation of the President’s idea of “the decisive breakthrough in preserving people of Russia and well-being of our citizens”²²).

V. Putin, who is the center of the system of state administration, created by him, for the elites and Russian society, had to explain the situation at the public level speaking directly

to society (about the pension reform in particular) in order to keep population’s trust he have always relied on while formulating and implementing grand ideas. **However, it did not cause a desired effect, due to the fact that, whatever the reasons, the main need of society and the grand idea of a “decisive breakthrough”, formulated on its basis, remained unfulfilled – for the first time since Russia has embarked on the path that it currently follows.**

Here we should note two factors that largely determined (along with the outright sabotage of presidential instructions by the ruling elites) the specifics of the formulation of V. Putin’s last grand idea and, at the same time, the specifics of the entire historical stage from 2018 to the present:

The first factor is a temporary failure in 2013–2017, after which the new need of society (need for change) was formed unnaturally early. “Life cycle” of each grand idea is 6–9 years. At

As shown by data of all-Russian surveys of VCIOM and regional studies of the VoIRC RAS, in 2018, the steady trend of declining level of approval of the President’s activities. emerged in public opinion surveys, and it has not been overcome until now.

In 2018–2019, support for the President decreased from 71 to 64% according to VCIOM data and from 66 to 57% according to the VoIRC RAS data.

“Russian officials are completely out of touch with life and ignore it... They consider the demonstration of their contempt for citizens to be a norm and a matter of honor, valor, and heroism. It is difficult to explain their behavior in any other way. **It seems that they are absolutely not going to fulfill the promises of the state. Just remember the May 2012 presidential decrees, and how the government sabotaged them for six years**”²³.

²⁰ Executive Order on the National Development Goals of the Russian Federation through 2030. July 21, 2020. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63728>

²¹ Ivanov A. Meet the author of the pension reform. *Zavtra*, 2018, June 24. Available at: http://zavtra.ru/events/avtor_pensionnoj_reformi_znakom_tes

²² See, for example: Byalyi Ju.V. Pension farce – 2018. *Information agency “Krasnaya vesna”*, 2018, June 29. Available at: <https://rossaprimavera.ru/article/365b3ffa?gazeta=/gazeta/284>; Shirov A.A., Potapenko V.V. On a fair pension system. *Expert*, 2018, no. 24, June 11–17, pp. 53; Bashkatova A. “NG” calculated how much pensioners will receive as a result of the reform. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2018, June 20. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/economics/2018-06-20/4_7248_minus.html; Obuhova E., Pahunov K., Ivanter A. This is a reform, baby! *Expert*, 2018, June 25, no. 26 (1080); Sergeev M. Initiators of the pension reform are backing out. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2018, December 27. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/economics/2018-07-12/1_7264_pensia.html; Tsuplyaev S.A. Pension maneuver. *Interview at the radio “Ekho Moskvy”*, 2018, July 7. Available at: https://echo.msk.ru/blog/tsuplyaev_s/2235806-echo/; Mironov M. What is the injustice of the pension reform? Available at: <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/mmironov/2224872-echo/>

²³ “Showing contempt is normal”: Delyagin explained why officials sabotage Putin’s May decrees (interview with M.G. Delyagin). *Information portal Tsargrad TV*, 2019, July 3. Available at: https://yandex.ru/turbo/tsargrad.tv/s/news/demonstracija-prezrenija-norma-deljagin-objasnil-pochemu-chinovniki-sabotirujut-majskie-ukazy-putina_206739

the same time, as it was noted, the beginning of a "life cycle" of the decisive breakthrough idea was not 2018 (when this wording and new national projects emerged) but 2014 – when the euphoria of the Crimean spring disappeared, and a new round of 2014–2015 financial crisis began.

Thus, 4 years have passed between the maturation of the need for change in society (2014) and the official wording of the course for breakthrough development (2018). This is a period comparable to the previous historical stage of building Russian statehood (2013–2017), during which V. Putin managed to implement two grand ideas at once. Obviously, over such a long period of time, the need for dynamic development of the level and quality of life, social justice has become extreme. In many ways, this is why the policy of prioritizing the solution of key issues within the country, announced in 2018, should have been a breakthrough.

The second factor is a natural change of generations. Russian society has significantly changed over the last 20 years: numbers of Russian voters are "replenished" by young

"FOM's survey shows that pessimistic estimations on the future are more common than positive one in the group from 18 to 30. And they are difficult to mobilize using time-tested methods of the cold war, the images of the advancing enemy and a besieged fortress. They do not understand why it is necessary to tighten their belts and suffer for the sake of this authorities, what exactly has they given the country in the last 10 years"²⁵.

people who do not care about the results achieved by Russian authorities in comparison with the 1990s. They were born after 2000, and they are concerned about Russia's progress in comparison with other countries, most of which are significantly inferior to Russia in terms of initial competitive advantages.

Thus, due to various reasons, the grand idea of the "decisive breakthrough" has not been implemented for six years (since 2014, when the social necessity arose). Coronavirus pandemic, which Russian and the whole world faced in 2019, only worsened the situation. However, the tense economic situation in relation to quarantine measures is only a "small brick" of

According to VCIOM exit poll, conducted on the day of the presidential election (March 13, 2018), "an average age of most voters (28.1%) was 60 years, 26.8 of respondents – 45 years. An average age of 21.4% of respondents is approximately 35 years, 15.6% – 25 years, 8.1% – 18 years"²⁴.

Based on these data, **45% of Russians**, who participated in the presidential election, were born in 1983 and later: in 2000, they were still underage.

24% of respondents (nearly every fourth one) were born in 1993 and later. **In 2000, they were at least 7 years old** and, consequently, their nearly whole conscious life happened after the "wild 90s" – during V. Putin's presidency.

"He [Putin] was the yoke of scales, on which two bowls of ways swung — patriotic and liberal. But, at a certain point, these scales were unbalanced: the patriotic way of life was out of Putin's control, as was the liberal way. The President failed to make the long-awaited breakthrough after the Crimea, a development that would connect these two ways. And everything went its own way. Within each, there was confusion, a complex system of decays. Therefore, Putin does not control these two huge areas of modern Russia. He probably controls the governors, the army, and the security forces, but to a lesser extent he monitors these huge social strata that have developed over the post-Soviet period, which are developing in their own way and quite chaotically"²⁶.

²⁴ VCIOM named an average age of the majority of those who voted in the elections. *RIA Novosti*, 2018, March 18. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20180318/1516645631.html>

²⁵ On the new social pessimism (editorial article). *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2020, September 14. Available at: https://yandex.ru/turbo/ng.ru/s/editorial/2020-09-14/2_7963_editorial.html

²⁶ Prokhanov A. I see Putin's problems, his drama. *Zavtra*, 2020, October 13. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/ya_vizhu_problemi_putina_ego_dramu

the process and not an explanation for the long-growing social pessimism.

As a result of such a long period of unimplementation, the idea of breakthrough development, which was hypothetically supposed to consolidate society, hit the President and the entire process of consistent construction of the post-Soviet statehood:

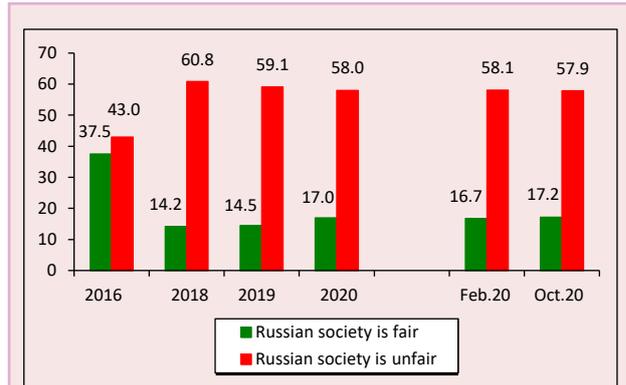
✓ The President began to lose control over the liberal and patriotic way.

✓ The level of approval of the President's activities started to decline.

✓ “Western partners”, always following the events in Russia and, definitely, desiring to get rid of their geopolitical rival, became active and started to put Russia in a circle of extremely negative events (not just territorially but essentially): Belarus, Khabarovsk, “Navalny's case”, Nagorno-Karabakh...

In January 2020, during his annual Address to the Federal Assembly²⁷, the President proposed specific amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. **This V. Putin's initiative might be seen as an attempt to create a new grand idea, since amendments to the Fundamental Law of the Country is just an instrument, and a goal itself is its content. These amendments can be divided into three blocks corresponding to three components of the new big idea: strengthening of the state's social obligations, strengthening of the power vertical, and actualization of civil and patriotic sentiments in society** (we wrote more about this in one of our previous articles²⁸).

Nevertheless, the principles, laid down in the amended Constitution of the Russian Federation, did not become the new big idea, even though



Source: data of public opinion monitoring of FSBIS VoIRC RAS

As we see, entry into force of amendments to the RF Constitution after the all-Russian vote on July 1, 2020 did not affect population's assessment of the structure of modern society: since 2019, majority of people (58–59%) consider it unfair.

V. Putin's initiative to change the Fundamental Law was again formulated very precisely, in accordance with the growing public demand for social justice and the value of the social state; the public was widely involved in this process and the majority of Russians still supported the amendments at the all-Russian vote on July 1, 2020: almost 58 million people voted “for” it (or 78% of citizens who took part in the vote).

The new “socially oriented” Constitution of the Russian Federation did not acquire the features of a big idea, did not give society an ideological impulse. For example, in March 2018 (after V. Putin announced a “breakthrough” development), the President received a record number of votes in the presidential election, but according to the results of the all-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution experts only noted: “It was not possible to consolidate society around amendments to the Constitution”²⁹. According to the results of our

²⁷ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on January 15, 2020. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62582>

²⁸ Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Another Step toward V. Putin's “Long State”. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2020, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 9–33. DOI: 10.15838/esc.2020.1.67.1

²⁹ Constitutional prologue to the future. *Expert*, 2020, no. 28, July 6–12.

analysis³⁰, conducted according to data of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, in 47 out of 86 RF entities, the share of votes cast against amendments to the Constitution was higher than average numbers in the country (21.27%). In some regions (for example, Murmansk, Omsk, Magadan oblasts, Khabarovsk Krai, Kamchatka Krai, Sakha Republic), this indicator reached 35–40%.

“Compared to “constitutional” vote on June 25, voter turnout significantly decreased on July 1, despite the introduction of a “three-day period”, i.e. early expression of the will of voters during Friday and Saturday, September 11–12, in addition to the “main” Sunday, September 13. This can be partially explained by a “local” nature of the past elections, which traditionally caused much less interest among our fellow citizens. But the difference here is such that the following conclusion is obvious: **Russian society as a whole, and especially in certain regions of our country, shows increasing political passivity, and this is less true for “national” entities of the Federation. This situation indicates not only a fundamental difference in the management systems of “ordinary” regions and republics within the Russian Federation, but also the process of alienation, if not confrontation, and distancing our society from the current system of domestic political power**”³¹.

³⁰ Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Vote of confidence for the President is confirmed. Achievement of socio-economic development goals before 2024–2030 is uncertain. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2020, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 9–37. DOI: 10.15838/esc.2020.4.70.1

³¹ Vinnikov V. Quiet backwater: on the results of a single political day. *Zavtra*, 2020, September 16.

³² The study sample includes 14 regions and 17 towns (their regional capitals and some major cities), where large, system-forming companies for the Russian economy are located (such as Nor Nickel, NLMK, Novatek, Siverstal, Lukoil, Metalloinvest, MMK, Evraz, PhosAgro, Acron, Rusal, Severalmaz, Polymetal).

³³ Among them:

Potanin V.O. (welfare – 19.7 bil. dol.; 1st position in Forbes);

Lisin V.S. (welfare – 18.1 bil. dol.; 2nd position in Forbes);

Mikhelson L.V. (welfare – 17.1 bil. dol.; 3rd position in Forbes);

Mordashov A.A. (welfare – 16.8 bil. dol.; 4th position in Forbes);

Alekperov V.Yu. (welfare – 15.2 bil. dol.; 5th position in Forbes) et al.

Share and number of votes cast for V.V. Putin at the presidential election on March 18, 2020 and vote on amendments to the Constitution on July 1, 2020, average for Russia

Indicator	March 18, 2018	July 1, 2020	Change 2018 to 2012
mil. people	56.4	57.8	+ 1.4
in % of turnout	76.69	77.92	+ 1.23

In regions and large cities with system-forming enterprises for the domestic economy³², the owners of which are not the last members of the Forbes list of the wealthiest businessmen³³, and these regions obviously have a more favorable position in comparison with other entities of the Russian Federation, 1.5 mil. less people voted for the amendments to the Fundamental Law, initiated by the President, in comparison with votes for V. Putin during the presidential election in 2018 (*Insert 1*).

As for regional and municipal elections, held on September 13, 2020, which became the first similar event after the adoption of the new Constitution, the picture is more clear: in comparison with the previous election day (September 15, 2015), turnout for elections increased only in the Arkhangelsk region (by 96 thousand people), the share of population who voted for members of the power party increased only in the Arkhangelsk and Irkutsk oblasts (by 100 and 99 thousand people, respectively; *insert 2*).

Number of votes cast for “United Russia” members at regional and municipal elections of 2015 and 2020 in certain entities of the RF

Indicator, thousand people	Single day of voting		Change, 2020 to 2015
	September 15, 2015	September 13, 2020	
Average for 6 regions*	1595,82	1512,21	-83,61
Average for 3 regions**	119,06	92,19	-26,87

* Belgorod Obl., Arkhangelsk Obl., Yamalo-Nenets AO, Chelyabinsk Obl., Irkutsk Obl., Magadan Obl.
** Lipetsk, Magnitogorsk, Magadan.

Insert 1

Number of votes cast for V.V. Putin at the presidential elections of 2000–2018 and for constitutional amendments on July 1, 2020 (data in abs. val., mil. people)

Territory*	Presidential elections						All-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution		Change (+/-)	
	March 26, 2000	March 14, 2004	March 2, 2008	March 4, 2012	March 18, 2018	July 1, 2020	2020 to 2000	2020 to 2018		
Total for RF	39,740	49,563	52,531	45,602	56,426	57,747	+18,007	+1,321		
Central FD	9,928	11,780	13,084	10,354	14,034	14,409	+4,481	+0,375		
Belgorod Obl.	0,401	0,457	0,638	0,534	0,711	0,799	+0,398	+0,087		
Lipetsk Obl.	0,268	0,399	0,482	0,382	0,542	0,480	+0,212	-0,062		
Northwestern FD	4,803	4,755	4,751	4,003	4,974	5,047	+0,244	+0,073		
Vologda Obl.	0,472	0,469	0,451	0,626	0,454	0,389	-0,083	-0,065		
Arkhangelsk Obl.	0,428	0,483	0,417	0,333	0,407	0,297	-0,131	-0,110		
Yamalo-Nenets AO	0,013	0,015	0,015	0,013	0,018	0,010	-0,003	-0,008		
Novgorod Obl.	0,260	0,214	0,210	0,180	0,209	0,173	-0,087	-0,036		
Ural FD	3,334	4,348	4,440	4,133	4,714	4,100	+0,766	-0,614		
Sverdlovsk Obl.	1,352	1,506	1,432	1,338	1,556	1,132	-0,220	-0,423		
Yamalo-Nenets AO	0,136	0,246	0,269	0,283	0,291	0,265	+0,129	-0,026		
Khanty-Mansi AO	0,341	0,481	0,528	0,470	0,600	0,488	+0,147	-0,113		
Chelyabinsk Obl.	0,893	1,237	1,214	1,125	1,276	1,190	+0,297	-0,086		
Siberian FD	3,729	5,361	5,772	5,232	6,171	5,451	+1,722	-0,721		
Irkutsk Obl.	0,586	0,622	0,739	0,595	0,764	0,530	-0,056	-0,234		
Krasnoyarsk Krai**	0,669	0,694	0,815	0,784	0,941	0,849	+0,179	-0,093		
Privolzhsky FD	9,436	12,023	12,323	11,015	12,271	13,016	+3,580	+0,745		
Samara Obl.	0,710	0,921	0,934	0,912	1,235	1,346	+0,636	+0,111		
Far Eastern FD	2,003	2,706	2,817	2,438	2,633	2,517	+0,514	-0,116		
Magadan Obl.	0,062	0,057	0,054	0,039	0,053	0,034	-0,028	-0,019		
TOTAL for 6 federal districts***	33,232	40,973	43,187	37,175	44,797	44,540	+11,307	-0,258		
TOTAL for 14 regions	6,591	7,802	8,198	7,614	9,058	7,981	+1,390	-1,077		

End of Insert 1

Number of votes cast for V.V. Putin at the presidential elections of 2000–2018 and for constitutional amendments on July 1, 2020 (data in abs. val., mil. people)

Territory*	Presidential elections						All-Russian vote on amendments to the Constitution		Change (+ / -)	
	March 26, 2000	March 14, 2004	March 2, 2008	March 4, 2012	March 18, 2018	July 1, 2020	2020 to 2000	2020 to 2018		
<i>Total for RF</i>	39,740	49,563	52,531	45,602	56,426	57,747	+18,007	+1,321		
Central FD	9,928	11,780	13,084	10,354	14,034	14,409	+4,481	+0,375		
<i>Belgorod</i>	0,078	0,089	0,116	0,111	0,144	0,154	+0,075	+0,010		
<i>Lipetsk</i>	0,120	0,159	0,179	0,138	0,189	0,097	-0,023	-0,092		
Northwestern FD	4,803	4,755	4,751	4,003	4,974	5,047	+0,244	+0,073		
<i>Vologda</i>	0,087	0,102	0,103	0,090	0,115	0,101	+0,014	-0,014		
<i>Cherepovets</i>	0,118	0,119	0,111	0,090	0,127	0,078	-0,039	-0,049		
<i>Arkhangelsk</i>	0,103	0,130	0,109	0,093	0,114	0,075	-0,028	-0,038		
<i>Naryan-Mar</i>	0,013	0,006	0,004	0,081	0,007	0,004	-0,009	-0,004		
<i>Veliky Novgorod</i>	0,064	0,057	0,061	0,105	0,072	0,048	-0,016	-0,024		
Ural FD	3,334	4,348	4,440	4,133	4,714	4,100	+0,766	-0,614		
<i>Yekaterinburg</i>	0,379	0,425	0,424	0,372	0,493	0,316	-0,063	-0,177		
<i>Salekhard</i>	0,009	0,015	0,019	0,022	0,019	0,021	+0,012	+0,003		
<i>Khanty-Mansiysk</i>	0,006	0,013	0,021	0,020	0,037	0,043	+0,037	+0,007		
<i>Chelyabinsk</i>	0,250	0,349	0,359	0,336	0,408	0,403	+0,153	-0,005		
<i>Magnitogorsk</i>	0,145	0,179	0,169	0,141	0,155	0,119	-0,026	-0,036		
Siberian FD	3,729	5,361	5,772	5,232	6,171	5,451	+1,722	-0,721		
<i>Irkutsk</i>	0,125	0,126	0,145	0,128	0,194	0,105	-0,020	-0,089		
<i>Krasnoyarsk</i>	0,192	0,192	0,240	0,237	0,323	0,303	+0,110	-0,021		
<i>Norilsk</i>	0,060	0,059	0,063	0,057	0,059	0,072	+0,013	+0,013		
Privolzhsky FD	9,436	12,023	12,323	11,015	12,271	13,016	+3,580	+0,745		
<i>Samara</i>	0,262	0,298	0,315	0,341	0,419	0,475	+0,212	+0,056		
Far Eastern FD	2,003	2,706	2,817	2,438	2,633	2,517	+0,514	-0,116		
<i>Magadan</i>	0,033	0,033	0,032	0,023	0,034	0,019	-0,014	-0,015		
TOTAL for 6 federal districts ***	33,232	40,973	43,187	37,175	44,797	44,540	+11,307	-0,258		
TOTAL for 17 towns	2,045	2,350	2,472	2,385	2,910	2,433	+0,388	-0,477		

* Federal districts were formed on May 13, 2000, after the presidential election (held on March 26, 2000), so data for federal districts for 2000 are conditional.

** Data for 2000 and 2004 – without Evenk and Taymyr autonomous okrugs, which were separate entities of the RF.

***Without South and North Caucasian Federal District.

Insert 2

Results of regional and municipal elections of 2015–2020 (number of votes cast for “United Russia”, thousand people)*

Region	September 15, 2015			September 13, 2020			Change (+ / -) of number of votes cast for
	Number		Number of votes cast for	Number		Number of votes cast for	
	population	voters		population	voters		
ELECTION RESULTS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL IN 2015–2020							
Belgorod Obl.	1547,94	1201,22	403,99	1549,15	1229,20	428,08	+24,09
Arkhangelsk Obl.	1183,32	979,70	109,52	1136,54	924,17	210,06	+100,54
Yamalo-Nenets AO	539,99	341,38	165,98	544,44	365,16	111,11	-54,87
Chelyabinsk Obl.	3497,27	2693,23	624,86	3466,37	2600,38	374,29	-250,57
Irkutsk Obl.	2414,91	1869,45	270,53	2391,19	1864,89	369,76	+99,23
Magadan Obl.	148,07	108,14	20,94	140,15	97,81	18,90	-2,05
TOTAL for 6 regions	9331,50	7193,11	1595,82	9227,84	7081,61	1512,21	-83,61
ELECTION RESULTS AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL IN 2015–2020*							
Lipetsk	501,15	409,96	31,53	508,57	401,96	38,52	+6,99
Magnitogorsk	417,04	318,56	76,39	413,25	311,96	46,31	-30,08
Magadan	92,97	71,98	11,14	92,05	67,025	7,36	-3,78
TOTAL for 3 towns	1011,17	800,50	119,06	1013,88	780,93	92,19	-26,87

*The table shows the analyzed regions where regional elections were held on September 13, 2020 (elections of heads of entities of the Russian Federation, elections of deputies of the Legislative Assembly).

On September 13, 2020, elections of senior officials were held in 18 regions of the Russian Federation (Republic of Komi, Tatarstan, Chuvash Republic, Kamchatka, Krasnodar, Perm Krai, Arkhangelsk, Bryansk, Irkutsk, Kaluga, Ko-stroma, Leningrad, Penza, Rostov, Smolensk, Tambov oblasts, Sevastopol and the Jewish autonomous oblasts). **Elections of deputies of legislative (representative) bodies of state power in entities of the Russian Federation were held in 11 regions** (Republic of Komi, Belgorod, Voronezh, Kaluga, Kostroma, Kurgan, Magadan, Novosibirsk, Ryazan, Chelyabinsk oblasts, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Oblast). **Elections of deputies of representative bodies of municipalities and ad-ministrative centers were held in 22 regional capitals** (Syktyvkar, Kazan, Izhevsk, Cheboksary, Krasnodar, Astrakhan, Vladimir, Voronezh, Ivanovo, Kaluga, Kostroma, Lipetsk, Magadan, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Orenburg, Orel, Ros-tov-on-Don, Smolensk, Tambov, Tomsk, and Ulyanovsk).

In general, in all analyzed regions, the support for authorities decreased by 84 thousand people, in cities – by 27 thousand people.

Assessing the results of the single day of voting on September 13, 2020, VCIOM general director V.V. Fedorov noted that **the scenario of the upcoming federal campaign for the government and its party is extremely pessimistic, despite the fact that “the main deterioration in the socio-economic sphere is yet to come”**. The main risk of the United Russia is the geographical distribution of the masses of voters. They are mainly concentrated in large cities and have oppositional views, so that “the electorate of villages and small towns loyal to the government will not be enough in 2021... the UR is experiencing euphoria today due to the victory on a low turnout and administrative mobilization, but it will not be possible to repeat this success in 2021 – the conditions in the federal campaign will be completely different. The strategy of “drying up turnout” at the federal elections is fraught with their delegitimization and therefore cannot be used”³⁴.

It is difficult to disagree with the opinion of experts who link various indicators of electoral

«... socio-economic problems, aggravated in most regions, **widespread social pessimism**, numerous claims to “old” governors, and amorphous society’s attitude to new ones: all of this does not allow us to predict the repetition of the same level of government support at the gubernatorial elections, as during the plebiscite or, for example, the presidential elections in 2018. **Therefore, the element of unpredictability in electoral behavior remains**”³⁵.

statistics (turnout dynamics, voting results) with the growing social pessimism in Russian society, which is a direct consequence and, at the same time, an indicative indicator of the effectiveness of public administration.

It is mostly shown by the results of sociological surveys that record the dynamics of public sentiment in “real time”, in contrast to electoral statistics, which are largely influenced by the campaign period preceding elections at any level.

To analyze trends of public opinion we took two indicators which seem the most representative to us:

1. Assessment of the President’s actions (as an indicator of society’s attitude to the general course of the country’s development, taking into account the historically high role of the presidency institution in Russia, as well as the attitude of Russian society personally to V. Putin).

2. Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI; as an indicator have not just economic but psychological meaning, because it simultaneously shows three aspects of social mood: the population’s subjective assessment of the current economic situation in the country, characteristics of personal financial situation, and forecasts of its development in the near future, so in fact CSI shows people’s ideas about life (their own and the country’s) today and tomorrow).

Both selected indicators are measured in the monitoring regime across the whole country (VCIOM, Levada-Center) and at the regional level (VoIRC RAS). At the same time, the impressive dynamics of data,

³⁴ Garmonenko D. During the Duma elections, United Russia will face seven risks. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2020, October 6. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/2020-10-06/1_7982_elections.html (based on the materials of the speech of V. V. Phedorov “Results of SED-2020 – prospects for the State Duma elections-2021” at the meeting of Scientific Expert Council “Russian Regional Elections 2020: Trends and Prospects », September 23, 2020.

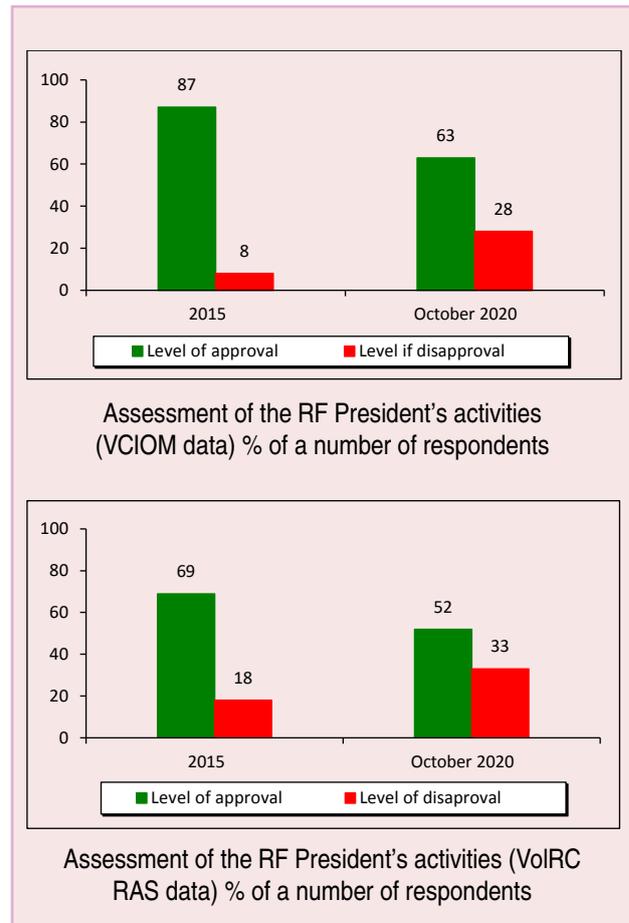
³⁵ Turovskiy P. Gubernatorial elections 2020: Between loyalty and protest. *Information website for political commentaries Politcom.ru*. August 17, 2020. Available at: <http://politcom.ru/23927.html>

covering basically the entire historical era of V. Putin's presidential terms (from 2000 until now), allows characterizing the process of transformation of Russian society and the efficiency of the public administration system during this period, including the provision of a clear answer to the question: "What is the reason for the growing social pessimism in society?"

All-Russian and regional data (despite different data collection methods) show one thing in general: over the last 5 years (since 2015), there have been no significant improvements in the dynamics of assessments of the President's activities (*Insert 3*).

According to VCIOM, since 2015 to October 2020, the level of approval of the President's activities declined by 24 p.p. (from 87 to 63%), and the share of its negative assessments increased by 20 p.p. (from 8 to 28%). According to VolRC RAS data, the share of positive assessments of the President's activities decreased by 17 p. p (from 69 to 52%) over the same time period, and the negative ones – increased by 15 p.p. (from 18 to 33%).

It is necessary to mention that the increase of positive assessments of the President's activities in 2013–2015³⁶ was probably related to the events of the "Crimean spring", which were definitely important for psychological state of the Russian society and strengthening of national identity but quite insignificant in terms of relevant problems bothering people and related to the level and quality of life, achievement of social justice, etc. Therefore, the period of time when the level of approval of the President's activities showed steady growth dynamics was not long (only 2 years – from 2013 to 2015).



Over the whole period V. Putin's presidential terms (since 2000 until now), there were only three short periods when the President's ratings sharply increased: 2000 (when the complex process of the country's restoration after the "wild 90s" began), 2007 (when this restoration process reached its peak), and 2015 (related to the growth of patriotic moods due to the entry of Crimea and Sevastopol into Russia). Despite these three moments, in the Russian contemporary history, public assessments of the President's activities has not shown positive dynamics – especially over the last 5 years (2015–2020) – and this "stagnation" more often manifests itself as a factor of social pessimism contradicting really ambitious right

³⁶ In 2013–2015, the level of approval of the President's activities increased by 15 p. p. (from 63 to 87%) according to VCIOM data, and by 14 p.p. (from 55 to 69%) according to VolRC RAS data.

and specific goals, declared by authorities in their public rhetoric according to VCIOM. The level of the President's activities approval was 80% in 2000 (the first year of V. Putin's presidency), and it was 60–65% in 2019 and 2020 (20 p.p. less).

Consumer Sentiment Index is also quite indicative³⁷. In general, in the period since 1999 until now (according to VolRC RAS data), population's assessments concerning the economic situation in the country, their financial situation, and forecasts for the future

could be called positive only before the global financial crisis. This is indicated by the CSI value exceeding 100 points in 2005–2008 (*Insert 4*)³⁸.

Pessimistic sentiments prevail in all other periods of the past 22 years, and they sometimes fluctuate in one direction or another due to the impact of certain events in the domestic and foreign political arena. The last 12 years are included: the results of VolRC RAS regional studies correlate with data of Levada-Center's all-Russian surveys.

³⁷ For reference: **Consumer Sentiment Index** is a summary indicator of the state's economy; an indicator designed to measure consumer confidence, defined as a degree of optimism about the state of the economy expressed by population through their consumption and savings. The index shows how optimistic consumers are about the country's economy.

The method of CSI building is that it aggregates private opinions of individual people who do not depend on each other and do not affect each other. CSI is based on mass surveys of population, so it is an indicator that **reflects the mood and behavior of the majority of the country's residents – not certain privileged or deprived groups of population** (for example, very rich or very poor). Thus, the change of the index is related to the behavior of the mass consumer. This makes CSI **an independent generalized macroeconomic indicator calculated on the basis of microeconomic information but characterizing the dynamics of the country's economic development as a whole**.

After World War II, the business community and the US government were concerned about population's actions with huge savings accumulated during the war. Will it be spent? If so, how and for what? For the purpose of studying consumers' intentions, sentiments, and behavior, J. Caton from the University of Michigan suggested conducting consumer surveys in 1946, and they have become common not only in the USA but many European countries.

Later it turned out that the analysis of consumers' behavior through a special Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI) allows saying not only whether the population is going to spend savings but answering more common question **about the level of optimism in relation to economic and social development in general**.

In addition, time has shown that CSI has a huge predictive potential. A certain respondent, being a consumer, usually assesses the situation on the commodity market on the basis of own random information. He/she may be seriously mistaken, but the prevailing vector of the mass of individual consumer estimates, it turns out, almost always correctly anticipates the short-term perspective of the economic situation (source: <https://economic-definition.com>)

³⁸ Methodology of CSI building, applied at VolRC RAS:

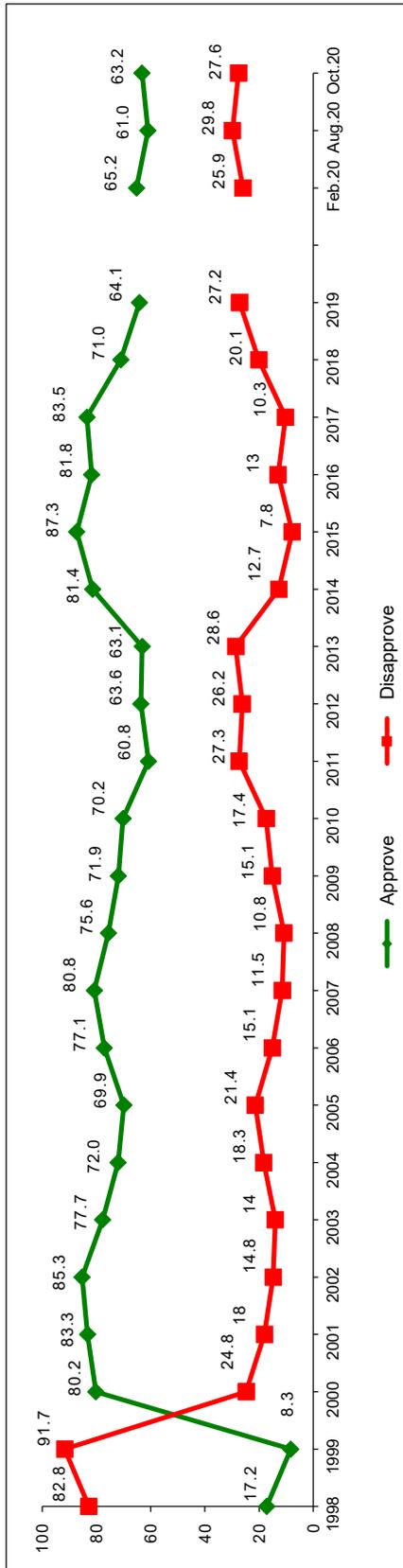
Consumer Sentiment Index is calculated on the basis of responds to questions:

1. How do You assess the financial situation in Your family: is it worse or better than a year ago? (respond options: "better", "worse").
2. If we talk about major purchases for a house, speaking in general, what do You think: is this a good or bad time to buy such goods? (respond options: "good", "bad").
3. What do You think: in a year, your financial situation will be better, worse, or about the same as it is now? (respond options: "will be better", "will be worse").
4. What do You think: the next 12 months will be a good time for the country's economy, a bad time, or something else? (respond options: "good", "bad").
5. If we speak about the following five years, will it be good or bad time for the country's economy (respond options: "good", "bad").

Private indices are calculated for each question. For this purpose, the share of negative responses is subtracted from the share of positive responses, and then 100 is added to the resulting value to avoid negative values. Thus, completely negative responses would give a general index of 0, positive – 200, the balance of the first and second expresses a value of the index of 100, which is, in fact, a neutral mark (- - -). The arithmetic mean of private indices gives the aggregate value - Consumer Sentiment Index.

Insert 3

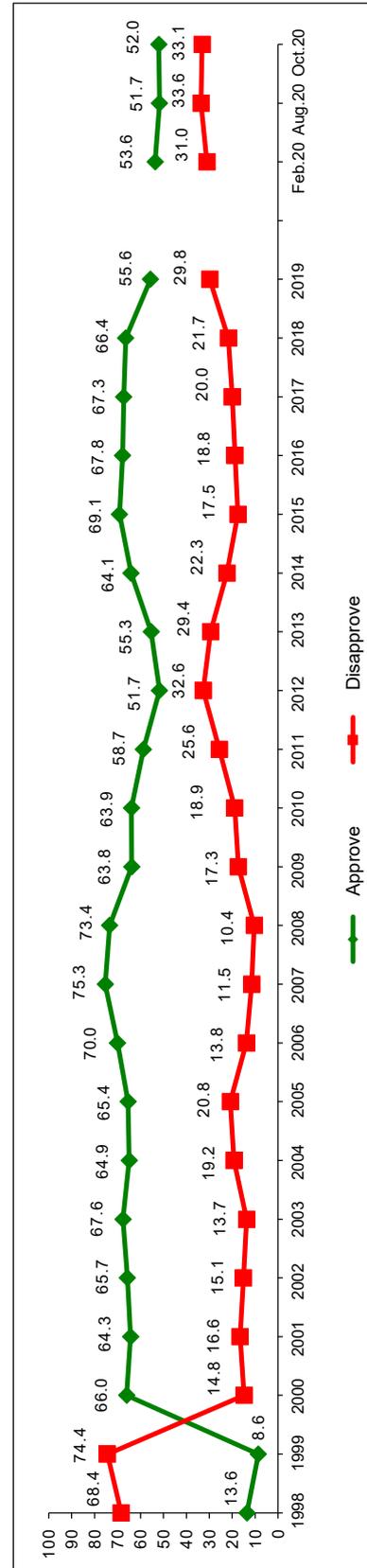
Assessment of the RF President's activities, % from a number of respondents



Data for Russia (VCIOM)*

* data for October 2020 – average for October 04–11, 2020

According to VCIOM, during the first years of V.V. Putin's presidency (2000–2002), the level of approval of his activities as the President was 80–85%. Currently, this indicator is 60–65%, and there is a trend toward its decline in yearly dynamics (in 2017, the share of positive assessments of the President's activities was 84%, in 2019 – 71%, in 2020 – 64%, in October 2020 – 63%).

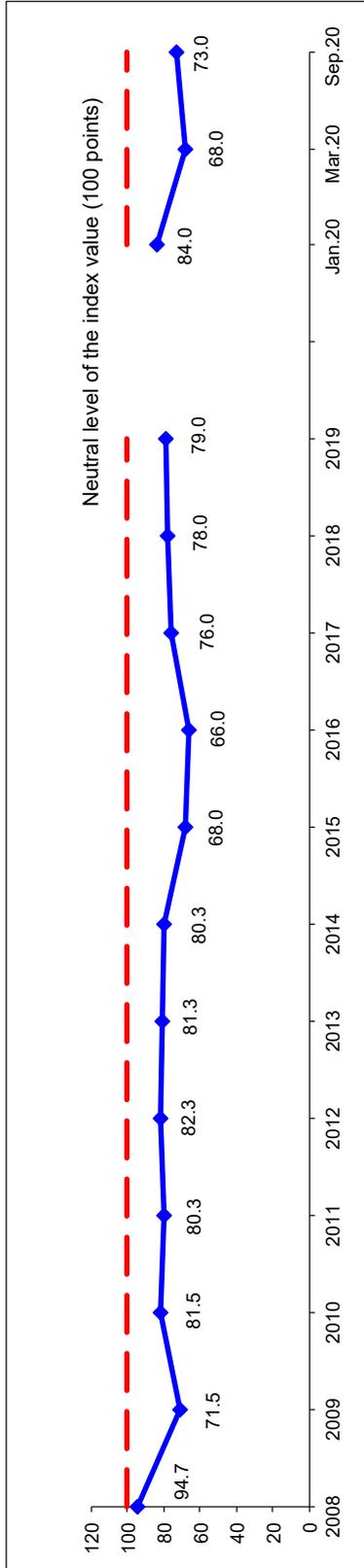


Data for the Volgda Oblast (VoIRC RAS)

According to VoIRC RAS, during the first years of V.V. Putin's presidency (2000–2005), the level of approval of his activities as the President was 64–68%. In 2019–2020, this indicator is 52–56%, which is significantly (by 10 p. p.) lower than in 2018.

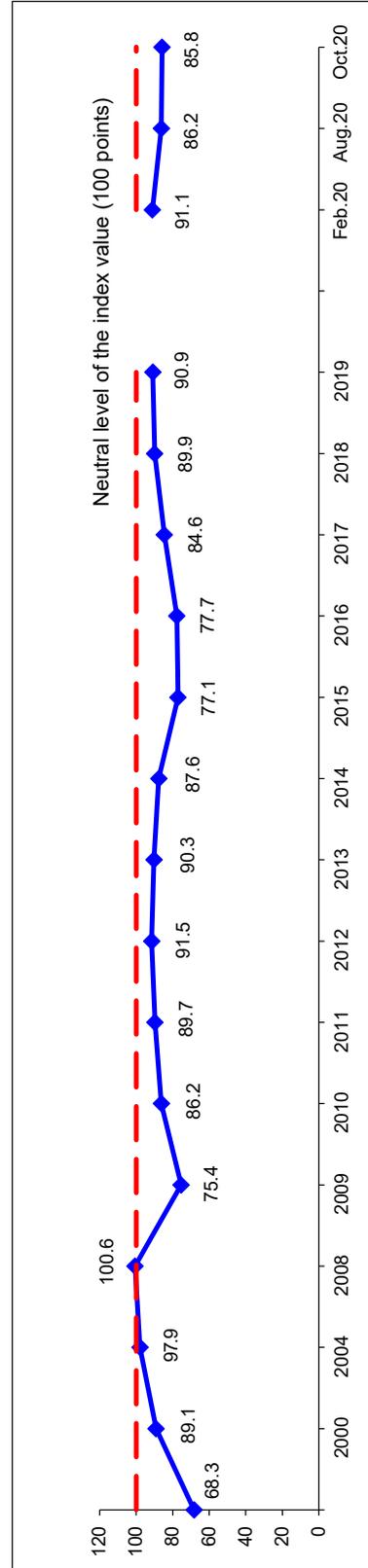
Insert 4

Consumer Sentiment Index (CSD), points



Data for Russia (Levada-Center)

According to Levada-Center, for the country in general, the Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI) has been below 100 points since the global financial crisis (2008). It means that negative assessments concerning economic situation in the country, own financial situation, and development prospects has been prevailing among Russian for the last 12 years. At the same time, CSI was 95 points in 2008, and it was 73 p. less in September 2020.



Data for the Vologda Oblast (VoIRC RAS)

According to VoIRC RAS data, the Consumer Sentiment Index exceeded 100 points (neutral level) only in 2005–2008, when the peak of recovery processes was reached after the crisis “wild 90s” stage for the Russian economy. Just like data of the all-Russian surveys of the Levada-Center, VoIRC RAS regional studies has been showing the prevalence of pessimistic assessments of Russians in relation to the economy, their personal prosperity, and development prospects since 2008–2009.

Thus, the recent increase of social pessimism could not be explained by the uncertain situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. First, Russian authorities manage to quite efficiently counter the spread of the infection³⁹; second, we see that pessimistic moods, related to the development of the Russian economy and own financial situation, have been prevailing over many years, and population's assessments have barely changed since the global financial crisis (2008). In other words, this process had started long before the emergence of initial news from China about upcoming epidemiological threat.

The real reason for the increasing social pessimism in Russian society does not depend on any external force majeure circumstances, but it includes two aspects: a long-term population's dissatisfaction with the efficiency of the public administration system, which is primarily related to the solution of the most relevant problems of citizens, concerning the level and quality of life, and the inability of the ruling elites to find a "common language" with society, which has changed dramatically during the period of market transformations.

Official statistics data show that, after the period of 2000–2008, there were no changes in the dynamics of population's incomes (*Insert 5*) in the following 12 years (2009–2020). Despite

many announced goals and responsibilities for this period, the poverty level remains stable. Similar dynamics of indicators is natural for vitally important and daily issues of population: availability of doctors and the quality of pre-school educational institutions (*Insert 6*).

In other words, after the last 12 years when D. Medvedev's Governments was mostly managing domestic policy issues⁴⁰, a very paradoxical situation emerged: more often authorities declare the utmost importance of people and the necessity to preserve nation's human capital (it certainly corresponds to objective requirements of our time), more apparent the difference between words and deeds becomes.

The conditions for maintaining health, getting education, and meeting the immediate financial needs of people do not improve, which is why the irritation among broad strata of

“Unfortunately, the reforms of the 1990s a disastrously hit the Russian science, when many specialists were forced to leave the profession and, most importantly, two generations of young people did not join the profession. According to data, given at the RAS General Meeting on November 13, 2019, a number of scientists in 1991 was 1 mil. and 600 thousand people, and currently this number is nearly 600 thousand people”⁴¹.

³⁹ As the President noted on September 15, 2020, “Russia ranks 40th worldwide in terms of the number of cases per 100,000 people and 100th in terms of mortality associated with this dangerous infection. Also, our country is the world's leader in the number of tests per 100,000” (source: Transcript of V. V. Putin's speech during an opening ceremony for two new multi-purpose medical centres in Pskov on September 15, 2020. *Official website of the President of Russia*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/64035>). The same data was announced by the head of Rospotrebnadzor A. Popova during the meeting of the RAS Presidium (Source: Belyaeva S. Using the approximation method. RAS prepares a springboard for the development. *Poisk*, 2020, no. 38, September 18. Available at: <https://poisknews.ru/magazine/metodom-priblizhenij/>)

⁴⁰ After his presidential term (2008–2012), D. A. Medvedev headed the RF Government from May 8, 2012 to January 15, 2020. It is 9 years out of 12 when, in Russia, there was the stagnation of population income, poverty level, and people's subjective assessments. In particular, Consumer Sentiment Index trends, which shows society's views on the current economic situation in the country, their personal financial situation, and prospects.

⁴¹ Volkonskiy V.A., Gavrilets Yu.N., Kudrov A.V. Liberalism and the state: economic growth and inequality. *Economics of Contemporary Russia*, 2020, no. 2, p. 156.

Russian society grows, forming an appropriate (as yet constructive) agenda for relations between society and authorities. However, if there are no tools to influence authorities, or they exist but do not work, then constructive irritation develops into social pessimism and apathy, as a result of which the turnout for elections decreases, assessments of government bodies at all levels worsen, and a gap of misunderstanding and distrust between society and authorities emerges. In the end, it can lead to irreparable consequences for the entire statehood (there are many cases of this in Russian and global history).

The problem is that the changes in society and the ruling elites have been occurring, to put it mildly, unequally over the last 20 years. The elite groups (families, clans) are mostly from the 90s: their system of liberal values, views, priorities do not change. The system of public administration is the same politburo⁴² (*Inserts 7–8*) about which the experts of the "Minchenko Consulting" holding wrote in 2012⁴³. No matter how many parties or civil

"Russian ruling class and "the power vertical", built by it, as a multi-year experience shows, are quite inert and lack efficient feedback systems with society in domestic policy. Let alone a lack of ideological unity. **It is not clear when and how this situation will change. But it definitely cannot go on forever.** Moreover, there are more than enough of those who are interested in destroying it in their own interests – safely and profitably. In our country and abroad. Modern Russian Federation, as the USSR during the "perestroika", is practically invulnerable to external military aggression, but it may be destroyed by a growing burden of internal contradictions, which, moreover, will be supported in every possible way from the outside"⁴⁴.

platforms there are in Russia, none of them can or really want to influence the government.

As experts note, "today, no opposition or alternative political structures – parliamentary, extra-parliamentary, "old", "new", "Pro-Russian", "Pro-Western" – have a strong trust of Russian voters and cannot show off a significant increase of such trust, "missing" current objective political agenda"⁴⁵.

⁴² Experts of Minchenko Consulting understand "Politburo 2.0" as an **"informal network structure of the coordination of interests of the main elite clans, in which the arbiter and most influential figure is Vladimir Putin"** (Source: "Politburo 2.0" and post-Crimean Russia": Report. *Official website of Minchenko Consulting*. October 23, 2014. Available at: https://minchenko.ru/analitika/analitika_42.html).

An analogy is drawn with the closed Politburo system that existed in the USSR: **"The apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU as the Central administrative structure of the formally ruling Communist party in the USSR was an organization with strictly regulated methods of work and a strict hierarchy.** Any paper in it passed at least five floors of the administrative vertical, was repeatedly agreed with various (but not all) interested persons. Within the apparatus, this formal order was maintained by the general department responsible for document management and the center for making internal party management decisions – the Secretariat of the Central Committee. There was also the institute of heads of secretariat departments of the apparatus, who were personally responsible for compliance with all the rules of office work. As a result, the preparation of any decision by the Central Committee staff was, first, a very long process, second, **closed to external control**, and, third, paradoxically leading to the increase in the impact of various lobbyists on the process.

A side effect of this formalization, which was called "bureaucratization" in the political jargon of the period, was the emergence of **informal methods of solving issues.** They did not fit into the bureaucratic framework, but they accelerated decision-making or forced to take into account certain interests that could have been bypassed in a formal approach to a case. Opportunities to solve a particular issue informally, especially using the system of already established informal contacts, were called, according to the Soviet lexicon, "personal connections" (Source: Mitrokhin N. "Personal connections" in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU. *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2012, no. 3. Available at: <http://www.intelros.ru/readroom/nz/n3-2012/14963-lichnye-svyazi-v-apparate-ck-kpss.html>)

⁴³ Vladimir Putin's big government and "Politburo 2.0": report. *Minchenko Consulting*. August 21, 2012. Available at: https://minchenko.ru/analitika/analitika_27.html

⁴⁴ Vinnikov V. Quiet backwater: on the results of a single political day. *Zavtra*. September 16, 2020.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

Insert 5

Poverty level (number of people with monetary incomes below subsistence minimum), % of total population number

Region	1995	2000	2010	2018	2000 to 1995, %	2010 to 2000, %	2018 to 2010, %	2018 to 2000, %	2018 to 1995, %
<i>Total for RF</i>	24.7	29.0	12.5	12.6	117.4	43.1	100.8	43.4	51.0
Irkutsk Oblast	32.3	35.5	18.1	17.7	109.9	51.0	97.8	49.9	54.8
Kranoyarsk Krai	24.2	24.4	17.9	17.1	100.8	73.4	95.5	70.1	70.7
Novgorod Oblast	22.8	34.2	14.9	13.8	150.0	43.6	92.6	40.4	60.5
Vologda Oblast	20.1	25.5	16.8	13.6	126.9	65.9	81.0	53.3	67.7
Arkhangelsk Oblast	26.9	33.5	14.0	13.5	124.5	41.8	96.4	40.3	50.2
Chelyabinsk Oblast	27.9	30.7	10.2	12.8	110.0	33.2	125.5	41.7	45.9
Samara Oblast	21.2	31.2	15.1	12.7	147.2	48.4	84.1	40.7	59.9
Magadan Oblast	24.6	30.9	13.6	9.5	125.6	44.0	69.9	30.7	38.6
Sverdlovsk Oblast	29.5	28.8	10.0	9.5	97.6	34.7	95.0	33.0	32.2
Khanty-Mansi AO	n.d.	11.8	10.3	9.0	n.d.	87.3	87.4	76.3	n.d.
Lipetsk Oblast	18.6	30.9	9.9	8.7	166.1	32.0	87.9	28.2	46.8
Belgorod Oblast	19.9	33.6	8.2	7.5	168.8	24.4	91.5	22.3	37.7
Yamalo-Nenets AO	n.d.	11.1	7.3	5.8	n.d.	65.8	79.5	52.3	n.d.

Source: Rosstat. Ranked according to data for 2018.

In all studied regions, as well as in the country in general, the poverty level significantly decreased in 2000–2010 (In Russia, the share of population with incomes below subsistence minimum in 2010 was 43% of this level recorded in 2000).

However, in the following years, there were no significant changes in the dynamics of the poverty level: in 2018, the poverty level across Russia was 100.8% of indicators recorded in 2010.

Mortality rate, per 1000 population

Region	1990	2000	2010	2018	2000 to 1990, %	2010 to 2000, %	2018 to 2010, %	2018 to 2000, %	2018 to 1990, %
<i>Total for RF</i>	11.2	15.4	14.2	12.5	137.5	92.2	88.0	81.2	111.6
Novgorod Oblast	14.1	19.8	20.0	16.7	140.4	101.0	83.5	84.3	118.4
Lipetsk Oblast	12.8	16.4	16.7	14.5	128.1	101.8	86.8	88.4	113.3
Vologda Oblast	11.9	15.7	16.7	14.4	131.9	106.4	86.2	91.7	121.0
Samara Oblast	11.0	16.4	15.2	13.5	149.1	92.7	88.8	82.3	122.7
Sverdlovsk Oblast	11.2	16.4	14.3	13.5	146.4	87.2	94.4	82.3	120.5
Belgorod Oblast	12.8	15.5	14.4	13.5	121.1	92.9	93.8	87.1	105.5
Chelyabinsk Oblast	10.5	15.4	14.4	13.2	146.7	93.5	91.7	85.7	125.7
Arkhangelsk Oblast	9.8	15.5	14.6	13.1	158.2	94.2	89.7	84.5	133.7
Irkutsk Oblast	9.8	14.9	14.4	13.1	152.0	96.6	91.0	87.9	133.7
Kranoyarsk Krai	9.6	14.7	13.5	12.4	153.1	91.8	91.9	84.4	129.2
Magadan Oblast	5.7	10.2	13.0	11.4	178.9	127.5	87.7	111.8	200.0
Khanty-Mansi AO	4.1	6.8	6.8	6.3	165.9	100.0	92.6	92.6	153.7
Yamalo-Nenets AO	3.3	5.6	5.5	4.7	169.7	98.2	85.5	83.9	142.4

Source: Rosstat. Ranked according to data for 2018.

Mortality rate among Russian population in all studied RF entities did not change much in 2000–2018 (according to official statistics), and it was higher than in 1990.

Insert 6

Number of doctors, per 10000 population

Region	1990	2000	2010	2018	2000 to 1990, %	2010 to 2000, %	2018 to 2010, %	2018 to 2000, %	2018 to 1990, %
<i>Total for RF</i>	45.0	47.2	50.1	47.9	104.9	106.1	95.6	101.5	106.4
Magadan Oblast	48.6	44.7	55.6	63.8	92.0	124.4	114.7	142.7	131.3
Khanty-Mansi AO	31.4	41.1	55.2	56.5	130.9	134.3	102.4	137.5	179.9
Arkhangelsk Oblast	43.2	47.8	56.6	56.0	110.6	118.4	98.9	117.2	129.6
Yamalo-Nenets AO	36.6	43.6	51.2	55.1	119.1	117.4	107.6	126.4	150.5
Kranoyarsk Krai	41.7	46.2	53.7	49.8	110.8	116.2	92.7	107.8	119.4
Irkutsk Oblast	41.2	44.7	49.9	48.7	108.5	111.6	97.6	108.9	118.2
Samara Oblast	45.0	47.7	47.7	47.7	106.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	106.0
Novgorod Oblast	36.5	36.6	41.3	43.3	100.3	112.8	104.8	118.3	118.6
Sverdlovsk Oblast	36.5	41.6	45.7	43.2	114.0	109.9	94.5	103.8	118.4
Chelyabinsk Oblast	36.4	39.2	43.0	42.0	107.7	109.7	97.7	107.1	115.4
Lipetsk Oblast	35.0	39.2	40.4	41.4	112.0	103.1	102.5	105.6	118.3
Belgorod Oblast	34.2	38.2	40.4	40.5	111.7	105.8	100.2	106.0	118.4
Vologda Oblast	31.0	34.1	34.6	35.3	110.0	101.5	102.0	103.5	113.9

Source: Rosstat. Ranked according to data for 2018.

Availability of doctors for population increased in nearly all studied regions in 2000–2010 (average for the country – by 6 p. p.). However, in 2010–2018, the growth of this indicator was recorder only in Magadan Oblast (by 15 p.p.). A number of doctors barely changed in 7 RF entities and decreased in 5 (by 5 p.p. – like in the country in general).

Number of pre-school educational institutions, un.

Region	1990	2000	2010	2018	2000 to 1990, %	2010 to 2000, %	2018 to 2010, %	2018 to 2000, %	2018 to 1990, %
<i>Total for RF</i>	87944	51329	45111	36581	58.4	87.9	81.1	71.3	41.6
Chelyabinsk Oblast	2285	1560	1542	1243	68.3	98.8	80.6	79.7	54.4
Sverdlovsk Oblast	3241	1651	1421	1212	50.9	86.1	85.3	73.4	37.4
Kranoyarsk Krai	1968	1100	985	937	55.9	89.5	95.1	85.2	47.6
Irkutsk Oblast	1798	1022	943	863	56.8	92.3	91.5	84.4	48.0
Belgorod Oblast	814	530	514	473	65.1	97.0	92.0	89.2	58.1
Vologda Oblast	1195	683	600	363	57.2	87.8	60.5	53.1	30.4
Samara Oblast	1571	941	641	339	59.9	68.1	52.9	36.0	21.6
Lipetsk Oblast	665	383	360	326	57.6	94.0	90.6	85.1	49.0
Khanty-Mansi AO	698	428	404	304	61.3	94.4	75.2	71.0	43.6
Arkhangelsk Oblast	1364	584	319	190	42.8	54.6	59.6	32.5	13.9
Yamalo-Nenets AO	299	209	188	167	69.9	90.0	88.8	79.9	55.9
Novgorod Oblast	555	277	281	160	49.9	101.4	56.9	57.8	28.8
Magadan Oblast	250	58	60	49	23.2	103.4	81.7	84.5	19.6

Source: Rosstat. Ranked according to data for 2018.

In all analyzed RF entities, as well as in the country in general, over the last 28 years (1990–2018), there has been a steady decline of the dynamics of a number of pre-school educational institutions. In general, its number decreased by 2.5 times in this period in Russia (from 88 thousand in 1990 to 36.5 thousand in 2018), for 2000–2018 – by 1.4 times (from 51 to 36.5 thousand).

“Politburo 2.0 and the anti-establishment wave” (June 5, 2019)

Source: https://minchenko.ru/analitika/analitika_80.html

Politburo 2.0 as an informal decision-making structure, formed around V. Putin, stayed even after the presidential election in 2018... The top league of the Russian elite only keeps people who are curators of significant industries and projects.

State-owned and near-state companies are being promoted to new sectors of the economy – up to the formation of certain markets from scratch (for example, a new waste recycling industry), and resources and markets are being redistributed from private companies and regional elites to members and candidates of Politburo 2.0.

Even modernization projects are supposed to be implemented within the framework of state programs or corporate procedures. The corporatist approach is also being extended to the political sphere. In political management, the emphasis is not on encouraging political competition but on selecting and cultivating new technocratic personnel.

The anti-establishment wave that has reached Russia becomes a serious challenge for the elites around the world. Authorities have faced a number of high-profile defeats in regional elections and protests according to the federal and regional agenda. **Society has formed a steady demand for a new type of politicians, which at the moment is not fully satisfied by the government or the opposition. Anti-establishment sentiments will likely be a key challenge for the Russian elites, because methods of its disposal, usual for the government (anti-nomenclature rhetoric of the President and his appointed governors, high-profile resignations, and recruitment of new personnel, the anti-corruption campaign), are close to exhausting its efficiency at this point.**

In 2018–2019, Putin’s Politburo 2.0 continued to function as the most influential informal political institution in Russia. **Politburo 2.0 includes people from Putin’s inner circle who have an ability to accumulate significant resources, manage it, and create their own networks of influence. As before, formal positions within the state system are important, but they are not decisive in assessing the political influence of leaders of the elite groups within Putin’s Politburo 2.0.**

An important factor in maintaining the balance of the elite groups is the division of zones of informal supervision by members of the Politburo 2.0. The highest concentration of interests is in the area of state capitalism, where the heads of the largest Russian state corporations S. Chemezov and I. Sechin remain beyond competition in terms of influence. At the same time, business models of formally private companies of G. Timchenko and the Rotenberg family are more often seen as the continuation of state policy.

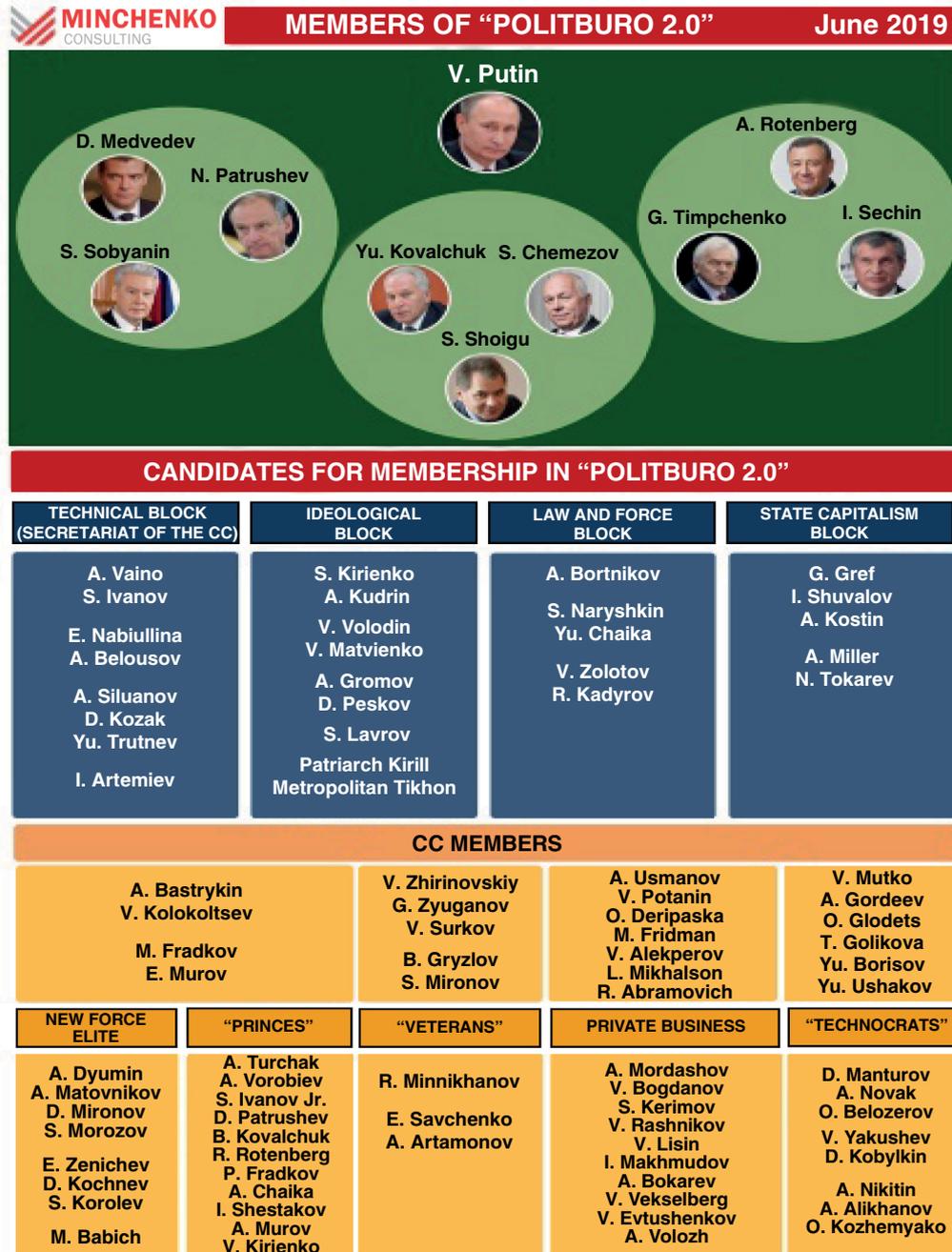
In the government of the Russian Federation, updated after the presidential election, the influence of full fledged members of the Politburo 2.0 on ministers remains decisive. It is rather difficult to name a minister who is not somehow affiliated with one of Politburo 2.0 members.

A high pressure exerted on the government by members of the Politburo 2.0 is related to the chosen tactics of the elite groups until the next transition of power. **Observers are not happy with the variety of tactics used by the ruling elites.** Each Politburo 2.0 member claims to be in charge of a very large structure that manages a large amount of resources. **In theory, the heaviness of such structure should exclude the possibility of its painless disbandment (too big to fall) and, sometimes, simple reformation – transfer to another influential member of the ruling coalition.** At the same time, Politburo 2.0 members constantly expand in their own and related areas, absorbing smaller players.

Despite growing competition within Politburo 2.0, **arguments between groups are still artificially kept out of the public political process.** Main competition methods between groups are personnel lobbying, information wars (moved to anonymous Telegram channels), and the usage of power tools. Moreover, a number of players who are immune to force persecution rapidly decreases.



Scheme 5. Russian elite. The model of the "Politburo 2.0"



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“It seems obvious to me that **if the government does not depend on the parliament and not accountable to it, it may negatively impact its efficiency. This is not good when there is no competitiveness in the party-political system...**

Often, the electoral process seems to exist in form, but in fact it does not. And now we are moving on to the constitutional reform, which involves putting the government under tighter control and responsibility not only to the President but also to the Parliament. **But as long as there is no normal system competition in the party-political system, the conditions under which the party system operates are not organic, they do not provide a normal representation of people in the parliament, and this requires serious work by both the government and society.** We need a bridge between citizens, elected parliamentarians, and the executive branch. And it is destroyed. **There is a government report, but it does not affect anything: even personnel policy in general.** It is possible to have an impact only by not approving the prime minister, but this is a crisis. And there is no working mechanism. **Therefore, the government is in irresponsible conditions”⁴⁶.**

Thus, we see that despite a firm official position of government authorities on de-ideologization of construction frame of post-Soviet Russia, its history can be seen in the form of sequential change of grand ideas that was marked by V. Putin as one of the necessary conditions of the course implemented by him.

The idea of liberalizing everything was welcomed in Russian society tired of outdated Communist ideology and the “Iron Curtain”.

The idea of power state, which replaced it, was necessary for the country and society to decisively overcome crisis consequences of failed democratic reforms of the 90s.

The idea of external positioning of Russia as a sovereign state and an equal partner in international relations became a logical

continuation of overcoming the most acute domestic problems (primarily related to the population’s level and quality of life, as well as strengthening of the power vertical).

The idea of national identity and consolidation on the basis of traditional spiritual and moral values emerged at the time when the restoration of Russia from the ruins of the Soviet Union started to seriously bother “collective West” powers – when this process became obvious and “seen” in the international arena.

Finally, *the grand idea of the “decisive breakthrough”* became necessary exactly when the understanding of the development vector formed in Russia (first of all, in Russian society and political discourse); it should be sovereign, independent of any other forces; the main obstacle for it is inside the country, not outside – in the value orientation and, as a result, in the efficiency of work among our own ruling elites.

In the context of the formation of Russian statehood through a chain of grand ideas, it should be noted that the new Constitution did not become a grand idea, since the idea of the “*decisive breakthrough*” for the first time disrupted the process of their historical continuity, which was ensuring the efficient construction of the new, post-Soviet statehood for nearly 20 years.

This is perhaps the main conclusion that we can draw looking at relatively recent Russian history: **no other grand idea will replace the previous one if it did not properly pass all three stages of its “life cycle”.**

All aforementioned ideas are united by the following provisions:

1. Each one (even in the early 1990s) corresponded to public sentiments. **This was, in fact, a dialogue between society and**

⁴⁶ Skorobogatyi P. Striving for the right-wing conservative flank (interview with NRU HSE Professor, Can. of Sci. (Law) V. Senin). *Expert*, no. 37, September 7, 2020. Available at: <https://expert.ru/expert/2020/37/stremlenie-k-pravokonservativnomu-flangu/>

authorities (which is natural if authorities are unwilling to allow any revolutionary events, and they want to maintain their dominant status in any elections of any level).

2. Each grand idea formed a **socio-political consensus**, under which a certain period of time had passed until this idea ideologically and psychologically exhausted itself.

3. Each idea had a logical conclusion and led to the emergence of a new one. **It was a historically successive and consistent process**, comparable to the process of a creative (constructive) destruction, the point of which is that something completely new appears very rarely. Usually, there is some rearrangement in the development process, recombination of factors within the existing paradigm⁴⁷.

4. **Every grand idea has been formulated by V. Putin personally since 2000. It was the basis of public trust in him (so-called "deep state"), but it also imposed personal responsibility for the implementation of the idea on him.**

5. Recent experience shows that **a new grand idea cannot be implemented until the exhaustion of a previous one – the completion of the whole "life cycle": from the maturation of social needs to implementation in state policy.**

Based on these conclusions, we can discuss what needs to be done today to preserve Russian statehood and overcome the impasse that the long-term historical process, launched by V. Putin in 1999, has reached.

Today, the solution of the most important domestic tasks is complicated by international events which are related to Russia, its geopolitical prospects, opportunities and capabilities for preserving the statehood:

these include protests in Belarus, escalation of Nagorno-Karabakh and Kyrgyzstan conflicts. Events in Russia are no less frightening: poisoning of A. Navalny, tensions in Khabarovsk. **Some experts see in these domestic and foreign events a united and consistent goal of adepts of "western" global project "on the background of chaos, created by them (including our territory, if it is allowed), to keep their own network administration system ... all actions, ones against Russia included, are strictly aimed at this"**⁴⁸.

"By the way, did anyone think about why Klishas and Krashennikov put forward their juvenile law again, which even the Patriarch opposed? Because if they manage to get it through, a large lobby will emerge that will build its income on sales of our children. Because fast and secret courts are necessary for one purpose – to take children away from families, and then sell them. The liberals' dream, by the way"⁴⁹.

Manifestations of how the western global project is trying to slow down the development of a nationally and socially oriented "red" project (Russia in particular) have always been, and they have always been different. However, the root causes of the President's unfulfilled promises to society and his direct instructions to the ruling elites are the problems of the public administration inefficiency, and they do not change.

Experts have been talking about this for a long time, but it is equally important that it becomes more and more obvious to society. Trust in the President and disbelief in the implementation of his policies by the ruling

⁴⁷ Schumpeter J. *The theory of economic development: an inquiry into profits, capital, credit, interest, and the business cycle* [Transl. from German by Avtonomova V.S. et al.]. Moscow: Progress, 1982. 455 p.

⁴⁸ Khazin M. Liberalism is incompatible with democracy. *Zavtra*. October 7, 2020.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

“So far, it is obvious that liberals, whether they are Western policy makers who use symbols of Freedom and Equality only as weapons for the destruction of states or part of the Russian elite acting in the name of personal enrichment, have earned a negative, contemptuous attitude from the majority of the Russian people... **It cannot be natural for our country to follow the path prescribed by the Western liberal-capitalist ideology.**

One of the main tasks of the state is to develop the economy in the context of high technologies and the requirements of scientific and technological progress. This task cannot be solved by primarily developing small and medium-sized businesses, although this area is undoubtedly important for the economy... The function of the state should be the support of a free and fair society through special institutions that can resist the anti-social actions of corporations and clan groups”⁵⁰.

elites increases the gap between society and the government and already affects the results of municipal, regional, and federal elections. Society (the electoral majority) is a resource that the President has always relied on, therefore, the growing apolitical nature of society “unties the hands” of liberal-minded elites, which ultimately boomerangs the implementation of population’s urgent needs and the main aspects of national security.

In these circumstances, many experts more often pay attention to the fact that “the time has come to publicly declare the ideology. V. Putin must do it, because residents of Russia will not trust anyone else”⁵¹. “The combination of the

scientific theory of long-term socio-economic development as a process of successive changes in technological and global economic patterns and traditional spiritual values can become a reliable support for the formation of a modern ideology that consolidates Russian society. Without it, it is extremely problematic to make a leap into the technological future”⁵².

It is difficult to disagree with this opinion, because the efficiency of public administration depends primarily on the interests that are pursued by people who carry it out.

We have repeatedly⁵³ agreed with experts who, in various formulations, said that Russia needs a new grand idea that would consolidate the most diverse segments of population and reduce the severity of accumulated contradictions. And we still share this opinion conceptually because, as it was shown at the beginning of our article, **grand ideas are means to build post-Soviet statehood (no matter how anyone feels about it).**

However, we see that new ideas do not work without historical continuity of this path. They definitely may succeed and to occupy a public agenda for several months (as it happened with constitutional amendments discussions in 2020), but they cannot become a driving force of a new historical stage. In this regard, in the current situation, it seems more appropriate to take steps aimed not at creating a new big idea but at **reviving the only historical process that Russia has been following since the beginning of**

⁵⁰ Volkonskiy V.A., Gavrilets Yu.N., Kudrov A.V. Liberalism and the state: economic growth and inequality. *Economics of Contemporary Russia*, 2020, no. 2, p. 157.

⁵¹ Kazakov A. Fox of The North. *Vladimir Putin’s Grand Strategy*. Saint-Petersburg: Piter, 2020. P. 202.

⁵² Glaziev S. Yu. Integrated system. *Zavtra*, 2020, no. 38.

⁵³ See, for example: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. “Intellectual feebleness” of the ruling elites and the “deep people” of the “long state”. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2019, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 9–35; Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. The problem of civilizational choice and its reflection in the key documents defining the present and future of Russia. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2019, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 9–23; Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. “Russian Federation – a welfare state?”: assessing the results of 25 years of implementation of Article 7 of the Russian Constitution. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2018, vol. 11, no. 6, pp. 9–25.

V. Putin’s presidential terms. Future generations will judge this path later, but Russia has no other choice today.

To “restart” this process, we should refer to more specific (practical, not ideological) measures which may impact the liberal-oligarchic stratum of the ruling elites that has become a “stumbling block” in the implementation of the goals of the “breakthrough” development. In particular, such measures are proposed by Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor, RAS Academician, Former Adviser to the President of the Russian Federation on Regional Economic Integration (2012–2019), Minister

for Integration and Macroeconomics of the Eurasian Economic Commission S.Yu. Glaziev. We share his fundamental opinion and regularly refer to it in our articles in “Editorial” section⁵⁴.

In the article “Integrated system”, S.Yu. Glaziev lists 12 “bearing pillars of the image of the future Russian socio-economic structure”⁵⁵. As the author himself emphasizes, this is “not an exhaustive list of components of the image of the future for the Russian socio-economic system”, but it is difficult not to agree with him that each of these “pillars” is a necessary and integral element of the future of the Russian state, without which this future simply will not exist.

1. Introduction of a mechanism of the government’s automatic responsibility for improving people’s welfare, level and quality of life by introducing a norm on their resignation in case of unjustified deterioration of a corresponding system of indicators. Creation of a system for objective assessment and promotion of personnel in state bodies and the public sector.
2. Introduction of a system of strategic and indicative planning implemented through contractual mechanisms of public-private partnership.
3. Stopping the export of capital, de-offshorization of the economy, restoration of mandatory sale of foreign currency earnings and export duties on the export of raw materials, introduction of a tax on currency speculation.
4. The reorientation of monetary policy and the banking system to refinance the growth of the production and investment activity.
5. Implementation of a comprehensive program of advanced economic development based on a new technological structure, deepening the processing of natural resources, and full activation of scientific and technical potential.
6. Withdrawal of natural rent to the state revenue, restoration of the system of environmental funds and payments for environmental pollution.
7. Double spending on health care with the elimination of private intermediaries in the system of public financing, on education and culture with the restoration of guarantees for the free provision of their services to population. The provision of universal social security, the introduction of a basic social income.
8. Triple increase of R&D expenditures, restoration of the leading role of the Russian Academy of Sciences, exemption from taxation of all expenses of enterprises for innovative activities.
9. Introduction of a progressive scale of income and inherited property taxation with exemption from them for the population with incomes below the subsistence minimum.
10. Restoration of the Unified energy system and nationalization of energy, transport, telecommunications, and social infrastructure.
11. Introduction of the Institute of participation of representatives of labor collectives in the management of enterprises, expansion of the network of national enterprises.
12. Restoration of the Soviet system of higher and secondary education, its orientation to the upbringing of a creatively active, patriotic person.

⁵⁴ For example: Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Nationally oriented rotation of the elites – the most important condition for the implementation of national projects. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2019, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 9–25; Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Revisiting the issue concerning the future of Russian statehood. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2018, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 9–29.

⁵⁵ Glaziev S. Yu. Integrated system. *Zavtra*, 2020, no. 38.

In conclusion, we would like to note that Russia needs a program of concrete actions at the federal level that is transparent, clear, and deeply understandable for nationally oriented elites and broad segments of population. This program should be developed on the basis of a large-scale discussion organized according to the rationalization proposals of the expert community members, who understand the essence and causes of key problems in the country and have repeatedly proved in their biography and professional activities commitment to the national-patriotic development course, implemented by V. Putin.

Society needs such action program, and many experts propose a specific solution and expect that it will be acknowledged and accepted for implementation.

The leading role and initiative on the transition from declaring the grand idea of the “decisive breakthrough” to its implementation was and still remains in the hands of the President. Especially after Russian society supported changes in the RF Constitution, and V. Putin received an opportunity to extend the presidential term until 2030⁵⁶ and to maintain his development course for another 10 years at least.

New Russian grand idea should start with the implementation of the “decisive breakthrough”. Otherwise, the whole historical path, our country has been following for the last 20 years, will continue to be “stuck”, weakening the foundation of the Russian statehood every month and every year and negating many truly important historical results achieved by the President.

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⁵⁶ “The provision of Part 3 of Article 81 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, limiting a number of terms when one and the same person may hold the office of President of the Russian Federation, applies to the person who held and (or) holds the office of the President of the Russian Federation **without regard to a number of terms during which he held and (or) holds this position at the time of entry into force of the amendment to the Constitution of the Russian Federation**, which introduces a matching constraint and does not exclude for him the possibility to hold the office of President of the Russian Federation within the period allowed by the specified provision (RF Constitution, Art.81, p. 3.1).

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