

EDITORIAL

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National Security Strategy – 2021: Positive Experiences and Conflicting Expectations



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Abstract. In May 2016, analyzing the interim results of the third presidential term of V.V. Putin, as well as the National Security Strategy, signed by the head of state on December 31, 2015, we have concluded that “the contradictions existing today in the public administration system are a natural result of the President’s activities” related to the unresolved task of “bringing the interests of the elites in line with the national security interests” (Source: Ilyin V.A. President Vladimir Putin’s third four-year term: contradictory outcomes – an expected result. *Economic and social changes: facts, trends, forecast*, 2016, no. 2 (44). pp. 9–21). Five years later, in the middle of 2021, a number of internal and external political events (including the new National Security Strategy signed by the President of the Russian Federation on July 2, 2021) again actualizes the question of the need to analyze the key changes that have occurred in the country during this period. How have the Russian society and the public administration system changed? What conceptual problems are still unresolved? And the most important: what role can the current trends

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in the development of the state and society play in the context of ensuring Russia's national security, taking into account the current situation in the domestic and foreign political arena by the middle of 2021? The following material reflects the authors' point of view on these issues. Based on expert assessments, data of official statistics, and Russian and regional sociological studies, the article analyzes the essence and prospects for the implementation of specific provisions of the National Security Strategy 2021. The authors come to the conclusion that the Strategy objectively reflects the current position of Russia in the domestic and foreign political arena by the middle of 2021, while its key points are aimed at a long-term perspective and are focused primarily on strengthening moral component of the Russian elites and Russian society. This causes positive feelings, but at the same time, based on the analysis of the previous experience in achieving strategic goals and objectives set out in the "May decrees" and national projects, it leaves conflicting expectations about the realism of their practical implementation.

Key words: National Security Strategy, national interests, spiritual and moral development, nationalization of the elites.

In recent months (June–July 2021), political life in the Russian Federation witnessed several major events, which, perhaps, can be viewed as RF President's purposeful steps aimed to strengthen Russia's geopolitical standing and its domestic socio-political situation. The events are as follows (in chronological order):

✓ **Adoption of a decree that bans extremist organizations from participating in the election (June 4)**¹; as a result, the functioning of all headquarters of Alexei Navalny* was suspended; and as of April 30, 2021, they are on the list of organizations with regard to which there is information about their involvement in extremist activities or terrorism,

✓ **the first meeting of the leaders of Russia and the United States (June 16)**, which signifi-

cantly deescalated international tension that was noted at the beginning of the year, and, according to experts, led to "the end of a short era during which American democrats perceived Russia ... as a regional power"²;

✓ **the beginning of the State Duma election campaign (June 17)**, it started with a significant renewal of the composition of the United Russia party; this corresponded to the public's request to supplement the party of power with new personalities (VTsIOM polls pointed it out back in 2019³). At the suggestion of the President⁴, people who have authority in society, are not involved in corruption scandals, and represent a fusion of experience and "young" political energy have become top figures in United Russia. The head of state noted that these are "people who have been

¹ See: Federal Law 157-FZ of June 4, 2021 "On Amendments to Article 4 of the Federal Law "On basic guarantees of electoral rights and the right to participate in a referendum of citizens of the Russian Federation" and Article 4 of the Federal Law "On elections of deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation".

² Remchukov K. Biden and Putin started the game. Quite possibly – a big game. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2021, June 17. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2021-06-17/2_8176_editorial.html

³ General Director of VTsIOM V. Fedorov noted that there is a request for updating the party of power. Its main content is "to make the party closer to the people, to rejuvenate its composition" (source: VTsIOM: Russians want to see new faces in the party of power. *TASS*, 2019, November 22. Available at: <https://news.myseldon.com/ru/news/index/219424411>).

⁴ On June 19, 2021, Vladimir Putin personally attended the 20th Congress of the United Russia party, where he introduced five of its new leaders. The federal part of the list in the party of power included Head of the Defense Ministry S. Shoigu, Foreign Minister S. Lavrov, Head Doctor of Kommunarka hospital D. Protsenko, Co-Chairman of the All-Russian Popular Front E. Shmeleva and Children's Ombudsman A. Kuznetsova.

* The activity of A Navalny's headquarters is recognized as extremist and is prohibited on the territory of the Russian Federation.

in politics for a long time – we usually call them political heavyweights – these people are relatively new in this sphere, but still, in one way or another, they represent the most important areas of our development, of our life”⁵;

✓ **a direct live TV phone-in (June 30)**; once again, it has shown that the head of state is concerned not only with the development of the military-industrial complex and international relations, but also with urgent issues of “ordinary” Russians (quality of medical and educational services, housing, vaccination, and many others) and that he understands them very well;

✓ **Publication of Vladimir Putin’s article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” (July 12)**, which was addressed not so much to the current Ukrainian authorities and the Ukrainian and Russian people, as to the entire “collective West”, to everyone “who wants to turn their own country into an anti-Russia project”⁶. As experts note, it was “in fact not just an article, but Russia’s ultimatum, clothed in the form of an artistic word, to the collective West and the government of Ukraine”⁷;

✓ **Russia’s first ever interstate complaint with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)** filed on July 22, 2021; it contained nine charges supported by concrete facts and figures⁸ against the ruling elite of Ukraine. Some experts describe this step as an “ideological attack”⁹, pointing out that Russia has become more active in terms of responding to various (economic, informational, political) measures aimed at curbing its development, which have long been used by the “collective West” in order to maintain a stable background of anti-Russian sentiment.

The quintessence of the above events was V. Putin’s signing of the new **National Security Strategy (July 2, 2021)** – “a comprehensive document that requires continuous updating and characterizes the dynamics of life and the vectors that are currently developing, first of all, in the sphere of national interests and priorities”¹⁰.

“The National Security Strategy is a fundamental document on strategic planning... it not only contains basic guidelines for making crucial management decisions, but is also a perfect reflection of ideological changes taking place in the Russian elite”¹¹.

⁵ Vladimir Putin’s speech at the 20th Congress of the All-Russian political party “United Russia” on June 19, 2021. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65886>

⁶ Umerenkov E. Putin’s article is not only about Ukraine. It contains a message to all the neighbors of Russia. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 2021, July 13. Available at: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/28303/4443767/>

⁷ Kobrinskii A.L. Putin’s article is an ultimatum, but not to Ukraine. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2021, July 15. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/vision/2021-07-15/5_8200_vision.html

⁸ Accusations of (source: *RIA-novosti*. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20210722/zhaloba-1742329455.html>):

- ✓ death of civilians, illegal imprisonment and ill-treatment of people, including on the Maidan, in Odessa and the Donbass;
- ✓ loss of life, infliction of bodily harm and destruction of property during the shelling of the adjacent Russian territory;
- ✓ suppression of freedom of speech and persecution of dissidents, including politicians and journalists;
- ✓ discrimination against the Russian-speaking population and the displacement of the Russian language;
- ✓ discrimination against Russian companies and entrepreneurs;
- ✓ depriving residents of the south-east of Ukraine of the opportunity to participate in elections;
- ✓ water embargo of Crimea;
- ✓ attacks on Russian diplomatic, consular and other missions;
- ✓ MH17 crash due to the fact that Ukraine did not close its airspace over the combat zone.

⁹ The opinion of State Duma deputy A. Zhuravlev (source: The program “60 minutes”, aired on July 22, 2021).

¹⁰ Andrey Koshkin, Head of the Department of Political Science and Sociology at Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, expert of the Association of Military Political Scientists. *RBK*. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/03/07/2021/60e0a1c79a7947a36edadc3d>

¹¹ Skorobogatyi P. Strategy based on one’s own strength. *Ekspert*, 2021, no. 29, p. 51.

The national security strategies of 2015 and 2021 are “strikingly different from one another”¹².

✓ The new version of the Strategy no longer mentions the danger of a costly confrontation with the West. But it contains some **new vocabulary**. Or rather, the old one, very similar to the one that existed in Soviet times. **The term “hostile action” is now used to denote not only an attempt to overthrow the government, but also “the imposition of alien ideals and values”¹³.**

✓ “This document speaks much clearer about linking the knowledge field, which is usually considered globally oriented by definition, to national interests... **The strategy should be perceived in the sense of the sovereinization of domestic science, education and, more broadly, the entire sphere of semantic construction and culture**”¹⁴.

✓ **For the first time, the system of national, ethical, moral and spiritual values is marked prominently**. “**Ideological leadership, which is necessary in the world**”, is highlighted as a separate priority. “This is the same resource that the Soviet Union once had and which we then voluntarily lost in the Russian Federation”¹⁵.

Based on expert opinions, we see an obvious trend to continue and strengthen the political course aimed at the sovereign and independent development of Russia. We can prove it by citing Vladimir Putin’s article of 1999, where it is stated that “every country, including Russia,

is obliged to look for **its own path of renewal**... It seems to me that the new Russian idea will be born as an alloy, as an organic combination of universal human values and the **original Russian values** that have stood up against the test of time”¹⁶.

At the same time, it is important to note that the Strategy-2021 is primarily not about economic or technological security (although these areas have their own innovations, too), but about the ideological, spiritual and moral state of the country itself and its corresponding positioning in the global world.

The Strategy notes that “the implementation by the Russian Federation of the state policy in the field of ensuring national security contributes to increasing internal stability, increasing the economic, political, military and **spiritual potential of Russia necessary to strengthen its role as one of the influential centers in the modern world**” (Item II.10). “Strengthening traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, preserving the cultural and historical heritage of the people of Russia” is proclaimed one of the national interests (Item III.25).

There were no such provisions in the previous editions of the National Security Strategy (2009 and 2015), and this, in our opinion, is a fundamental point that largely reflects the relevance of the problem of lack of spirituality, which we discussed in previous articles¹⁷.

¹² Petrov G. The Russians and the Chinese again decided to become brothers forever. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2021, July 4. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/world/2021-07-04/1_8189_brothers.html

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Krestovskii V. An unexpected Putin. *Zavtra*, 2021, July 5. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/neozhidannij_putin

¹⁵ An opinion of A. Podberezkin, Director of the Center for Military-Political Studies of MGIMO (source: Experts assessed the changes in the national security strategy signed by Putin. *RBK*, 2021, July 3. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/03/07/2021/60e0a1c79a7947a36edadc3d>

¹⁶ Putin V.V. Russia at the turn of the millennium. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 1999, December 30. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html

¹⁷ Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Where does the soullessness of the ruling elites lead? *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 9–28; Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Focus on finances as a factor of Russia’s national vulnerability in the 21st century. *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 9–33.

However, according to experts, “Putin would not be Putin if he did not balance these [patriotic] absolutely clear and unambiguous orientations with something directly opposite... sovereignty, independence, traditional values, the national idea – all this is immediately refuted by liberal spells... The positive core of the national security doctrine is beautiful and evokes full support and solidarity. But we cannot but see the contradictions already inherent in it from the very beginning. The sovereign patriotic realist document is rigged with liberal inclusions”¹⁸.

This peculiarity shows the presence of inconsistencies not only in the National Security Strategy itself, but also in V. Putin’s entire political course: patriotic slogans coexist with liberal reforms; the priority of Russia’s independence in the international arena is declared, and at the same time its economy, education, and science depend on liberal-capitalist dogmas; breakthrough development of the military-industrial complex goes hand in hand with long-term stagnation of living standards and quality of life; striving for the ideals of a social state coexists with “crony capitalism” – this fact, among other things, contributes to Russia’s top positions in the world in terms of income inequality; there is a continuous search for the national idea as the foundation of national identity and, at the same time, the Constitution imposes an official ban on ideology; poverty is recognized as one of Russia’s top priority issues, but there is no national project (that is, a plan, mechanism, tools) to address this issue...

The list of contradictions could be continued. The fact is that their roots are **in the very system of public administration built on the personal role of V. Putin in regulating the balance of interests between groups (families, clans) that adhere to opposing values and collectively constitute the ruling elite of the country.**

The Strategy-2021 notes “the strengthening of civic consciousness” of Russians, “growth of social engagement”, “involvement in solving the most urgent problems of local and state significance” (Item II.11); the Strategy-2015 did not contain these items. In other words, the trend of increasing self-sufficiency (which was previously noted in sociological studies, in particular, those conducted by experts from the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences¹⁹) is so important and obvious that it was recorded in the National Security Strategy as one of the objective characteristics of modern Russian society.

However, the growth of society’s self-sufficiency also implies an increase in its demands on the authorities, as well as the aggravation of relations between society and the authorities, if these requirements are not fulfilled or will not be fulfilled according to what society expects. And here we are no longer talking about promises, plans, or “Russia’s standing in the international arena”, etc. We are talking about specific indicators of the standard of living and quality of life, or rather about how the broad segments of the population subjectively perceive positive changes in the dynamics of their financial situation.

¹⁸ Dugin A. New peaks and inertia of bipolar disorder. *Zavtra*, 2021, July 22. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novie_novshini_i_inertciya_bipolyarnogo_rasstrojstva

¹⁹ See, for example: *Russian society in the spring of 2016: Worries and hopes: Information and analytical summary based on the results of an All-Russian study*. Moscow, 2016. P. 30.

A. Podberezkin (director of the Center for Military-Political Studies of MGIMO): **“Just like the previous strategy, [the 2021 version] lacks implementation mechanisms.** It is emphasized that the national security strategy is the basic document for other strategies and concepts. At the same time, there are no implementation mechanisms, except for the annual report of the Secretary of the Security Council on the state of security in the Russian Federation”²⁰.

V. Katasonov: “... the new version of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation is **an amputated version of 2015**: its Section VI was cut off. “The main indicators of the state of national security”... **It does not specify the validity period of the document. So there are neither deadlines, nor indicators.** And the lack of deadlines makes it possible to replace the current version with a more advanced one at any time”²¹.

Yu. Vorotnikov (chairman of the Political Technologies Committee for the Russian Association of Public Relations): “In the document, which should define the general direction, goals and ways of ensuring national security, I want to see the main idea – the center of crystallization, around which the entire system will be built... The lack of a unifying concept indicates that a single idea about the future of Russia has not yet been developed”²².

In this regard, the National Security Strategy of 2021 has inherited the shortcomings of the two previous strategies (2009 and

2015). Experts say that there are no specific deadlines and mechanisms for its implementation, and this becomes extremely important amid growing social activity of Russians and the aggravating socio-economic problems related to the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life, which are priority issues on the agenda of key requests of society.

Moreover, the complex implications of the coronavirus pandemic are not the cause, but only a trigger of these problems. For example, according to the state of inequality, Russia currently occupies a leading position in the world. A study conducted by Ipsos²³ has shown that in our country, people most often express concern about such forms of inequality as income inequality (83%; *Fig. 1*) and inequality between rich and poor regions (64%; *Fig. 2*). For comparison, these indicators worldwide are 60 and 42%, respectively²⁴.

According to the Ipsos international survey, 83% of Russians believe that income inequality is one of the most serious types of inequality. The concern of the Russian population is significantly higher than in the United States (57%), China (57%), Germany (59%) and a number of other countries.

The severity of the problem of inequality between more and less deprived regions in Russia is noted by 64% of its population; for comparison: in the U.S. – 38%, China – 40%, Germany – 22%.

²⁰ Experts assessed the changes in the national security strategy signed by Putin. *RBK*, 2021, July 3. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/03/07/2021/60e0a1c79a7947a36edadc3d>

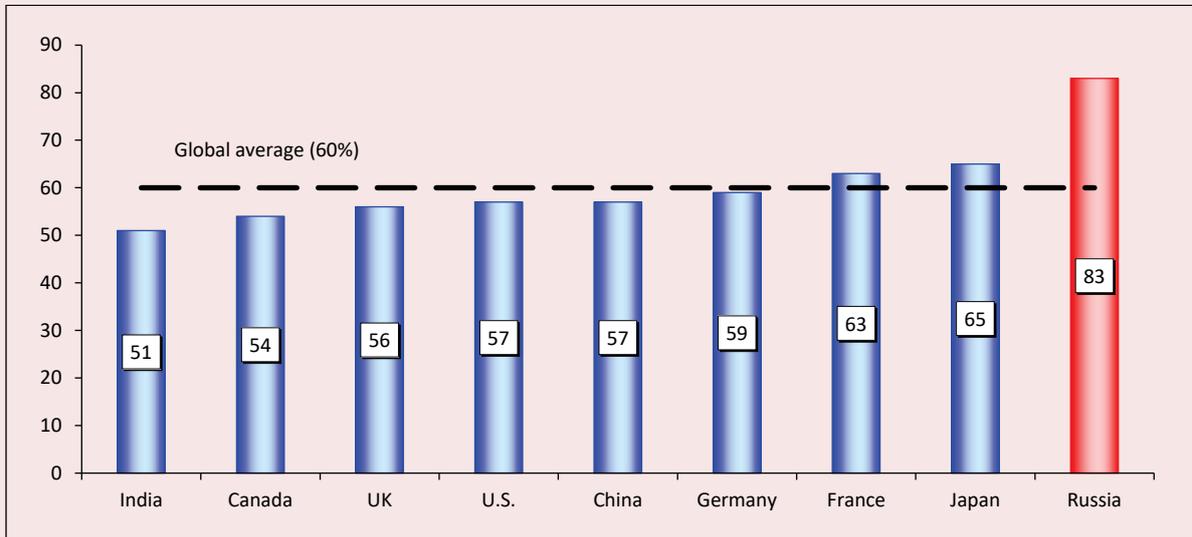
²¹ Katasonov V. Putin’s strategy. *Information resource Discred.ru*. Available at: <https://www.discred.ru/2021/07/12/valentin-katasonov-strategiya-putina/>

²² Skorobogatyi P. Strategy based on one’s own strength. *Ekspert*, 2021, no. 29, p. 54.

²³ The survey was conducted by Ipsos in 28 countries on the Global Advisor online platform in the period from December 23, 2020 to January 8, 2021; the survey covered 23,004 adults, including those aged 18–74 in the United States, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa and Turkey, aged 21–74 in Singapore and aged 16–74 in other markets (source: Ipsos official website. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/ru-ru/kakie-vidy-neravenstv-vidyatsya-naibolee-seryoznymi>).

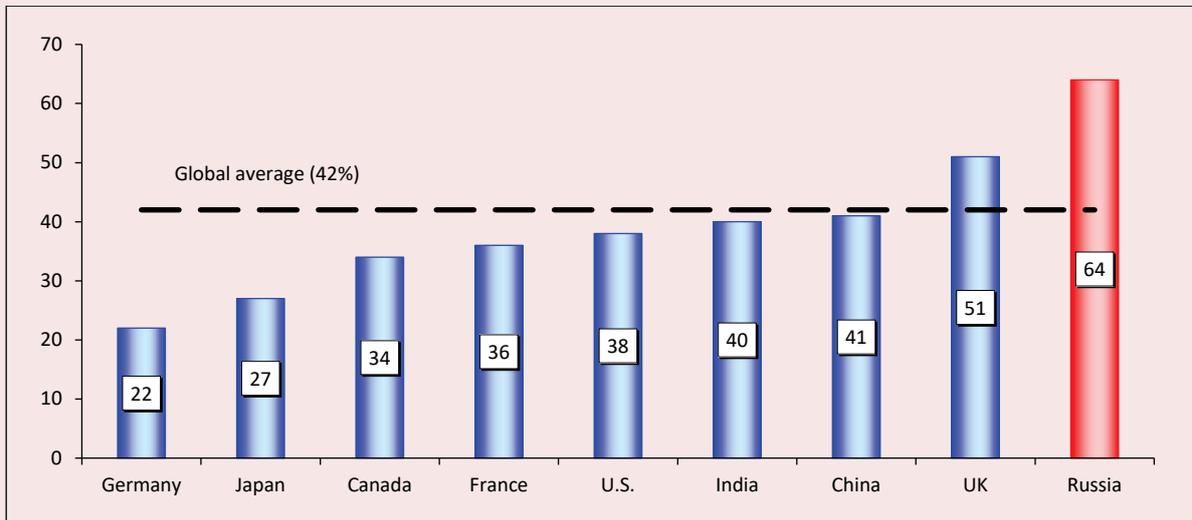
²⁴ The figures show the key countries. The full list is presented in the Ipsos report (source: Official website of Ipsos. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/ru-ru/kakie-vidy-neravenstv-vidyatsya-naibolee-seryoznymi>).

Figure 1. Proportion of those who see income inequality as one of the three most serious types of inequality in their country, % of respondents



Source: Ipsos report, March 19, 2021. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-03/inequalities_around_the_globe_0_0.pdf

Figure 2. Proportion of those who believe that the inequality between more and less deprived regions is one of the three most serious types of inequality in their country, % of respondents



Source: Ipsos report, March 19, 2021. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-03/inequalities_around_the_globe_0_0.pdf

There are also quite a few reasons for skepticism with regard to another key problem for Russian society – the dynamics of the poverty level.

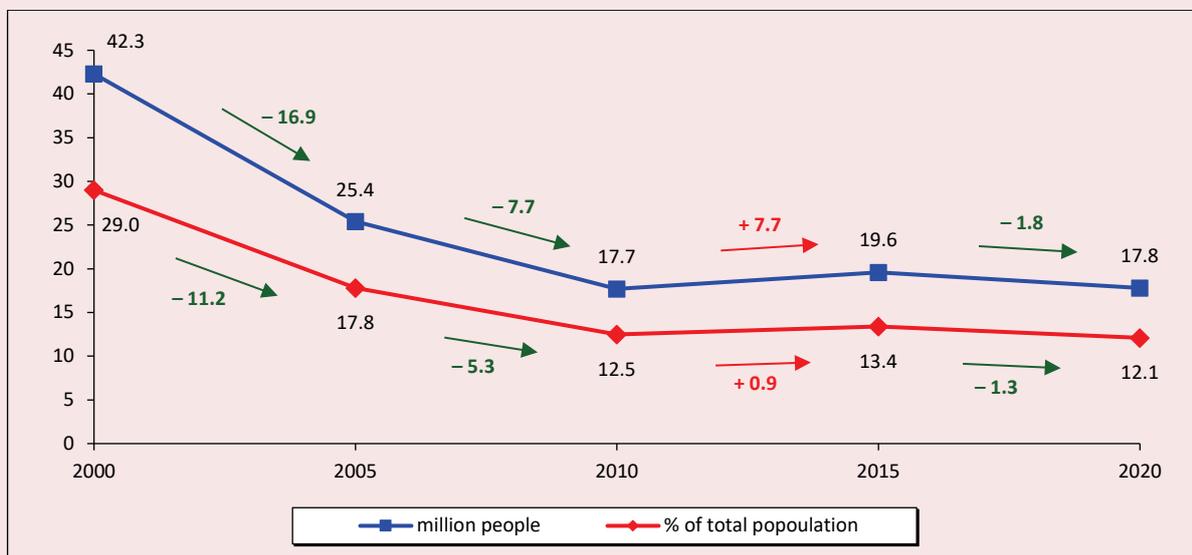
T. Golikova noted that “in 2020, despite the negative impact of the pandemic, it was possible

“Various nationwide measurements demonstrate that in the Russian Federation, the intolerance of citizens toward economic inequality is higher than the global average. And if, in general, fears related to coronavirus are growing globally, then in Russia, citizens are primarily concerned about unemployment, low wages and poverty... One of the country’s national development goals is to reduce the poverty level by half by 2030. But how do the authorities hope to overcome poverty in a country where the economy is already stagnating regardless of the crisis, and no prerequisites are being created for improving the well-being of its citizens?”²⁵

not only to avoid an increase in the poverty level, but also to reduce it to 12.1%”²⁶. However, we should also point out that there has been a clear stagnation in the general trend of the poverty level over the past 20 years. If during the first 10 years of V. Putin’s presidential terms (2000–2010), the share of the population with incomes below the subsistence level decreased from 42 to 18 million people (from 29 to 13%), then over the subsequent ten-year period (2010–2020), this indicator did not actually change (18 million people, or 12% of the total population; *Fig. 3*).

It is also difficult to talk about the effectiveness of the implementation of the “breakthrough” announced by the President during his Address to the Federal Assembly in 2018. According to Rosstat, from 2018 to 2020, the share of people with monetary incomes below the subsistence level decreased by 600

Figure 3. Amount of people with monetary incomes below the subsistence level



Source: Rosstat.

²⁵ The growth of social inequality in the country is the number one topic in Russia (editorial article). *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2021, July 6. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2021-07-06/2_8191_editorial.html

²⁶ Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects on July 19, 2021. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66217>

thousand (from 18.4 to 17.8 million people), or by 0.5% of the total population (from 12.6 to 12.1%).

Since 2021 Russia has shifted to a new method of calculating poverty (taking into account the exact minimum, which is set once a year and linked to the median income, and not the consumer basket), but this, most likely, will not have any significant effect on the overall situation. Thus, according to the estimates of the Accounts Chamber, even taking into account the new calculation formula, the level of poverty “has remained virtually the same in 2013–2019... It was in the range from 14.6 to 14.2%, not responding in any way to either economic growth or economic downturn”. According to the results of 2019, poverty level in the country was 12.3%, in the first half of 2020 –13.2%²⁷.

“At first, the May 2018 decree prescribed that it was necessary to reduce the level of poverty in the country by half by 2024. This was one of the national development goals, which, however, had to be adjusted in the context of the pandemic. The new presidential decree (dated July 2020) prescribes a reduction in the poverty level by two times by 2030 compared to the indicator of 2017.

But after changing the methodology for calculating the subsistence level, all new data on poverty cease to be comparable with the old ones. They can no longer be compared in order to track how the President’s goal is being achieved”²⁸.

But it is already obvious that the introduction of a new methodology for calculating poverty poses a threat of turning the real implementation of the May Decrees of the President of the Russian Federation into manipulations with statistics in order to obtain formal reporting.

In fact, there are two poverty levels in Russia, and the comparability of their indicators has yet to be achieved; according to some experts, “at the tactical level, it is necessary to calculate poverty using two methods at once, at least until the current decree expires”²⁹.

In these circumstances, it is for a reason that experts show their concern about the fact that “now it will again be necessary to make clarifications to the presidential decrees on national development goals... What levels and indicators will we focus on after the introduction of a new formula for calculating the subsistence level? What kind of poverty will we fight against?... Which indicator should we reduce, and which one should we report? Or will it soon be unimportant, because over the next 10 years, the national development goals themselves will also change?”³⁰

In one of the previous articles, we said that the lack of positive dynamics in addressing people’s most pressing problems, the “stalling” of national projects and, in general, the vulnerability of Russia from the point of view of internal socio-economic development – all these issues have their roots in the soullessness of the ruling elites as “*a personal feature of individual members of the ruling elites who have lost their sense of moral responsibility to society,*

²⁷ Bashkatova A. Poverty will adapt to national goals. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2020, October 18. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/economics/2020-10-18/1_7992_poverty.html

²⁸ Bashkatova A. The share of the new poor in Russia increased by 20%. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2021, July 25. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/economics/2021-07-25/1_8207_economics1.html

²⁹ New poor people have appeared in Russia. *Argumenty Nedeli*, 2021, July 26 (an opinion of D. Zhuravlev, scientific director of the Institute for Regional Problems).

³⁰ Bashkatova A. Poverty will adapt to national goals. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2020, October 18. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/economics/2020-10-18/1_7992_poverty.html

to the vocation to protect and defend the national interests of the country in connection with the priority of personal, selfish interests”³¹. Moreover, this soullessness was largely the result of the purposeful policy of the global elites, who actively inculcate the liberal-capitalist ideals of the “consumer society”.

With regard to countering this key and systemic trend, the National Security Strategy of 2021 has some understatement and inconsistency. The Strategy contains a key idea concerning the fundamental independence of Russia’s geopolitical status in the conditions when “moral leadership and the establishment of an attractive ideological basis for the future world order are coming to the fore” (Item II.19)” and when Russia is surrounded by “unfriendly countries” that “seek to isolate the Russian Federation” (Item II.18), “try to use the socio-economic problems existing in the Russian Federation to destroy its internal unity” (Item II. 20). However, this key idea is **not accompanied by specific mechanisms for how the entire Russian society, and (first of all) the ruling elite of the country, will resist the global policy of imposing the ideology of “consumer society”.**

In part, this question is answered by emphasizing the importance of Russia’s spiritual potential – a step that is certainly necessary and that is aimed, among other things, at solving the problem of nationalization of the elites. But the Strategy also does not provide for specific mechanisms related to it.

Experts note that “the answer to the challenges facing global capitalism is possible to find only through cooperation between the

leading developed and developing countries, which implies **the ability of their elites to limit their claims**”³². But the Strategy does not specify how this can be achieved.

At the same time, practice shows that so far there are no prerequisites for the Russian elites to begin to limit their claims. So, at the latest Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF-2021), First Deputy Prime Minister A. Belousov once again revealed the excess profits of the owners of the largest metallurgical corporations, which they swindled out of the state³³.

We recall that in 2018, in an open letter to the President of the Russian Federation, A. Belousov already proposed to withdraw 513.7 billion rubles from 14 metallurgical, mining and chemical companies in order to implement the May decrees. According to Press Secretary for the President of Russia Dmitry Peskov, Vladimir Putin agreed with the need to work out the proposal of his assistant and made the corresponding instruction. However, the data announced by A. Belousov at the SPIEF-2021 have shown that the question of directing the excess profits of large businesses to solve problems related to national interests remains unresolved.

It is fundamentally important that A. Belousov’s letter emphasized that “there are no conditions for additional withdrawals of excess income because of the current tax system”³⁴. **That is, we are not talking about any particular cases or criminal situations, namely, about the long-term, system-wide nature of this problem that exists within the framework of Russian legislation; we are talking about quite**

³¹ Ilyin V.A., Morev M.V. Where does the soullessness of the ruling elites lead? *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*, 2021, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 9–28.

³² Yakovlev A.A. Where is global capitalism headed? *Mir Rossii*, 2021, vol. 30, no. 3, p. 29.

³³ Belousov claimed that metallurgists have swindled 100 billion rubles out of the state. *RBK*, 2021, May 31. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/business/31/05/2021/60b3dc129a7947f1cbf45323>

³⁴ Ivanov A. To withdraw excess income. *Zavtra*, 2018, August 10. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/events/iz_yat_sverhdohodi

official conditions that allow representatives of large businesses to evade directing excess profits to the implementation of national interests.

Such conditions include Federal Law no. 76 “On Amendments to Articles 224, 275 and 284 of Part 2 of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation”³⁵, which was signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin on May 16, 2007 and actually became a mechanism for implementing the 2005 budget address to the Federal Assembly, where the head of state proposed to consider the issue of “improving the taxation of dividends received by Russian legal entities

from investments in subsidiaries, which should encourage the establishment of holding companies in the Russian Federation”³⁶.

The law provided for the introduction of a zero income tax rate from January 1, 2008, calculated on dividends from the strategic participation³⁷ of Russian organizations in other companies. Using the example of the two largest metallurgical corporations, we can clearly trace the consequences of this step: for the period from 2008 to 2019, 318 billion rubles were withdrawn from PAO Severstal and 308 billion rubles from PAO NLMK (*Tab. 1*).

Table 1. Income of metallurgical plants from participation in other organizations and non-accrued income tax from 2000 to 2019, million rubles

Period	PAO Severstal			PAO NLMK		
	Income from participation	Amount of tax revenues that the Vologda Oblast budget did not receive*		Income from participation	Amount of tax revenues that the Lipetsk Oblast budget did not receive*	
		Amount, mln rub.	% of tax revenues		Amount, mln rub.	% of tax revenues
2008	229	46	0.1	29559	5912	17.7
2009	62	12	0.04	28780	5756	22.1
2010	4	1	0.002	14640	2928	9.6
2011	2838	568	1.4	4084	817	2.4
Average for 2008–2011	783	157	0.4	19266	3853	12.9
2012	14908	2982	6.8	16677	3335	9.3
2013	9016	1803	4.2	20965	4193	11.1
2014	54351	10870	23.5	22882	4576	10.5
2015	44320	8864	18.7	23545	4709	9.6
Average for 2012–2015	30649	6130	13.3	21017	4203	10.1
2016	11063	2213	4.0	14861	2972	5.8
2017	60924	12185	19.5	37962	7592	14.0
2018	63825	12765	16.4	21967	4393	7.0
2019	56513	11303	13.5	72099	14420	23.9
Average for 2016–2019	48081	9617	13.4	36722	7344	12.7
Average for 2008–2019	26504	5301	9.0	25668	5134	11.9
2016–2019 to 2008–2012, times	61.4		34.3	1.9		1.0
Amount for 2008–2019	318053	63612		308021	61603	

* Consolidated budgets of constituent entities of the Russian Federation.
Source: own calculations using financial reports of metallurgical corporations and the Federal Treasury.

³⁵ The draft law was introduced by State Duma deputies (V.A. Pekhtin, A.V. Bezdolnyi, A.B. Kogan, L.V. Pepelyaeva, V.S. Timchenko, E.A. Fedorov, S.V. Chizhov) on August 3, 2006 (source: System for legislative activity support. Available at: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/329216-4>).

³⁶ Budget Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on budget policy in 2006. Available at: <https://rulaws.ru/president/Byudzhethnoe-poslanie-Prezidenta-RF-Federalnomu-Sobraniyu-ot-24.05.2005/>

³⁷ Participation is recognized as strategic if it meets the requirements established by the Tax Code of the Russian Federation, namely: the shares are owned for more than 365 calendar days, and the share in the authorized capital exceeds 50%.

Thus, the non-accrued income tax from these enterprises for 12 years amounted to 63.6 billion rubles from PAO Severstal and 61.6 billion rubles from PAO NLMK.

Another example is Federal Law no. 321 “On amendments to Parts One and Two of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation in connection with the creation of a consolidated group of taxpayers (CGT)”. The draft law itself was introduced by the Government of the Russian Federation on June 18, 2010³⁸ and its final version signed by the RF President Dmitry Medvedev on November 16, 2011.

This mechanism authorized holdings to transfer unprofitable companies to the total financial result, thereby reducing income tax receipts to the budget. The merger into the CGT allowed metallurgical corporations to reduce the tax burden.

For example, the financial resources of the parent company PAO Severstal allowed accumu-

lating impressive amounts of equity and profit on the accounts of the consolidated group of taxpayers OOO Holding Mining Company. For 2010–2019, the total amount of profit before tax received by the company amounted to 233.6 billion rubles (*Tab. 2*). However, despite the profitability of the company, profit tax was paid only in 2010–2011 and 2018–2019.

As a result, in general, for the period from 2010 to 2019, the actual profit tax amounted only to 451 million rubles out of 46.7 billion rubles of the estimated one. Thus, the regional budget did not receive more than 40.5 billion rubles.

A. Bryzgalin (lawyer, tax advisor): “Initially it was clear that the CGT is an institution that is profitable not just for groups of companies, but for SUPER-LARGE holdings, because the conditions for creating your own CGT are quite strict under the law and few people can meet them”³⁹.

Table 2. Financial performance of OOO Holding Mining Company* from 2010 to 2019, million rubles

Year	Own capital**	Profit before tax	Actual profit tax	Estimated profit tax	out of it in:		Net profit
					federal budget	regional budget	
2010	80748	124	89	25	3	22	-193
2011	91850	11287	185	2257	226	2031	11102
2012	101454	21782	0	4356	436	3920	21670
2013	101179	4687	0	937	94	843	5132
2014	72771	12153	0	2431	243	2188	12110
2015	77337	28565	0	5713	571	5142	28566
2016	84162	6367	0	1273	127	1146	6825
2017	123974	90509	0	18102	2715	15386	89811
2018	93364	24612	135	4922	738	4184	25190
2019	86205	33480	42	6696	1004	5692	33441
Amount for 2010–2019	913044	233566	451	46712	6157	40554	233654

* OOO Holding Mining Company was established by PAO Severstal on October 7, 2003 for the purpose of managing holding companies. The number of employees, according to various estimates available online, was 1–10 people. A.A. Mordashov became General Director of the company.
 ** It includes the authorized capital, reserve capital and retained earnings.
 Source: OOO Holding Mining Company. Available at: <https://www.list-org.com/company/204221>

³⁸ System for legislative activity support. Available at: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/392729-5>

³⁹ Bryzgalin A. Interesting figures on consolidated groups of taxpayers (KGTs). *Ekho Moskvy*, 2014, March 20. Available at: https://echo.msk.ru/blog/brizgalin_av/1283062-echo/

Table 3. Countries with the largest number of billionaires

Rank	Country	Population, million people*		Number of billionaires, people**		Number of billionaires per 1 million population		Dynamics of the number of billionaires per 1 million population 2021 to 2020
		2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	abs. (+ / -)
1	U.S.	332.6	335.0	615	724	1.85	2.16	+0.31
2	China	1424.5	1428.5	387	626	0.27	0.44	+0.17
3	India	1383.2	1397.4	102	140	0.07	0.10	+0.03
4	Germany	83.4	83.4	106	136	1.27	1.63	+0.36
5	Russia	143.9	143.8	98	117	0.68	0.81	+0.13
6	Brazil	211.8	213.3	45	65	0.21	0.30	+0.09
7	Canada	37.6	38.0	44	64	1.17	1.68	+0.52
8	UK	67.3	67.6	46	56	0.68	0.83	+0.14
9	Italy	60.6	60.6	36	51	0.59	0.84	+0.25
10	Japan	125.3	124.8	26	49	0.21	0.39	+0.19

* Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) database. Available at: <https://stats.oecd.org/>
** Source: Forbes rating – 2021. Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/milliardery-photogallery/425573-20-stran-s-naibolshim-kolichestvom-milliardero-2021-reyting-forbes> (excluding Hong Kong as a territorial administrative unit of China).

A practical step corresponding to the implementation of national interests could be an increase in individual income tax rate for people with super incomes. According to the number of dollar billionaires, the Russian Federation is among the top five countries (Tab. 3), therefore, an additional tax on super income could significantly contribute to the implementation of national projects. However, this decision has not yet been adopted.

Thus, we see that the very system of public administration functions in such a way that the stated goals and guidelines of its activities largely differ from the actual steps taken. Against the background of the proclaimed priorities of raising living standards and improving the quality of life, reducing poverty and, in general, developing human potential, in practice, representatives of big business manage to lobby for laws that reflect their personal interests only; this exacerbates the problem of social inequality, and with it the need of the general population for social justice.

As we can see, a consistently high level of poverty and social inequality in Russia coexists with equally stable signs of “crony capitalism”, when only certain representatives of elite groups receive high profits facilitated largely by the norms of legislation. In other words, the contradictory nature of the National Security Strategy of 2021, as noted by many experts, **fully reflects the real state of the entire system of public administration that has developed over the years during which the current political course was being pursued.**

This raises quite reasonable concerns about the future of national projects, even though at the last meeting on national projects, the President emphasized: “We are not going to reschedule the implementation of the tasks that have been set.” He told the Government that “we should not look for excuses to delay the fulfillment of our promises to the people “until later,” or “at some point”⁴⁰.

At the same time, we should note that drawing the attention of Government members to the timely and accurate implementation of

⁴⁰ Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects on July 19, 2021. Official website of the President of the Russian Federation. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66217>

national projects has actually become an annual practice for the head of state.

Many experts start paying more attention to a number of historical parallels that can be drawn between the internal state of the ruling elites of modern Russia and the governing bodies of the “stagnation era” of the USSR. “The gap between propaganda and reality is beginning to resemble the late Soviet times”⁴¹. On the one hand, the elite is made up of people who “are not imbued with ideology, but know

it only at the level of learned formulas”⁴², they use utilitarian approaches to the results of science, culture and education, but, at the same time, actively participate in the “development” of these spheres by imposing their own will there. On the other hand, in general, there is a total de-ideologization of the regime in Russian society, thanks to which not only the administration system, but also the ordinary person loses the “energy of a big goal”⁴³; and discontent and protest are

2018:

From Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting with members of the Government on May 26, 2018: **“There can be no excuses that some kind of circumstances prevented you from doing this work with high quality, at the due level and on schedule”**⁴⁴.

From Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting with members of the Government on October 2, 2018: “I have already talked about this and I want to bring you back so that we don’t fall asleep on the move... **We must implement what has been planned.** I want everyone to understand this well and be ready for difficult and strenuous work... **I would like to emphasize once again: it is necessary to reach all the goals indicated in the Decree**”⁴⁵.

2019:

From Vladimir Putin’s speech at the meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects on May 8, 2019: “One delay triggers a series of others and the work stalls. Please stick to the established deadlines. Changing deadlines should be a rarely used and properly substantiated exception to the rule. Better yet, get rid of this habit altogether... When I emphasized in the Address that “there is simply no time to lose,” this was not a figure of speech but a clear-cut, strict and individual requirement – to the Government, federal agencies, and to regional and municipal teams. I would like to ask you to be guided by this at all times, not just by some reporting dates or deadlines for fulfilling instructions”⁴⁶.

2020:

From Vladimir Putin’s speech at the expanded meeting of the State Council Presidium on September 28, 2020: “Already in 2021, there should be a high-quality, tangible result for each of the national goals... **To keep the work going, I repeat once more: do not put off what we have to do today. And these tasks should not be delayed until 2024**”⁴⁷.

⁴¹ Dugin A. New peaks and inertia of bipolar disorder. *Zavtra*, 2021, July 22. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novie_vershini_i_inertiya_bipolyarnogo_rasstrojstva

⁴² Mekhanik A. Stagnation and ideological emptiness of power. *Ekspert*, 2021, no. 22, p. 63.

⁴³ What Russians dream about (reflections of sociologists): Analytical report. Prepared in cooperation with the Representative Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in the Russian Federation. FNISTS RAN. Moscow, 2012. P. 171. Available at: https://www.isras.ru/files/File/Doklad/Analit_doc_Mechti/O_chem_mechtayut_rossiyane_Zaklyuchenie.pdf

⁴⁴ Meeting with members of the Government on May 26, 2018. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57563>

⁴⁵ Meeting with members of the Government on October 2, 2018. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58684>

⁴⁶ Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects on May 8, 2019. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60485>

⁴⁷ Expanded meeting of the State Council Presidium on September 28, 2020. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64105>

gradually maturing among the intelligentsia. According to experts, in the era of stagnation, “de-ideologization has destroyed political and economic administration systems together... the elite was unable to change due to the fact that they did not know and did not understand the country... **and these factors still largely dominate our elite**”⁴⁸.

The contradictory nature of the National Security Strategy of 2021 also reflects the contradictory nature of the dynamics of public sentiment. On the one hand, by the middle of 2021 (apparently, due to such steps as amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, comprehensive support for various socio-demographic groups during the pandemic, etc.), it was possible to interrupt the negative trend of deterioration in people’s psychological well-being, which was outlined after the announcement of the pension reform in 2018.

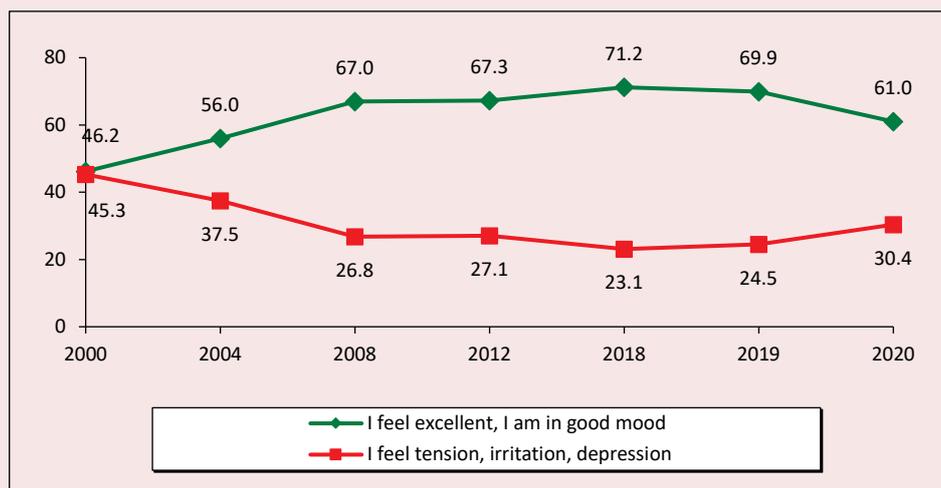
According to the results of monitoring studies conducted by Vologda Research Center of RAS (VoIRC RAS) in the Vologda Oblast,

until 2018, the share of positive assessments of the social mood of residents of the region has been growing steadily (for the period from 2000 to 2018 – by 25 p.p., from 46 to 71%; *Fig. 4, Insert 1*). However, after the announcement of the pension reform, the proportion of people who positively assess their own daily emotional state began to decline, from 2018 to 2020 it decreased by 10 p.p. (from 71 to 61%).

Granted, this process was largely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, but we note that none of the 14 major socio-demographic groups showed any positive changes in the dynamics of social mood back in 2019, that is, before the world learned about the existence of coronavirus.

And, nevertheless, over the past 12 months (from August 2020 to August 2021), we have managed to achieve positive changes in social mood in all segments of the population. In the Vologda Oblast as a whole, the share of those who experience mainly positive emotions increased by 11 p.p. (from 57 to 68%); in some groups, this indicator reaches 15–18 p.p. (for

Figure 4. Average annual dynamics of social mood assessments, % of respondents



Source: VoIRC RAS public opinion monitoring.

⁴⁸ Mekhanik A. Stagnation and ideological emptiness of power. *Ekspert*, 2021, no. 22, p. 68.

example, among the least affluent segments of the population, and among residents of Cherepovets (*Tab. 4; Insert 1*).

Thus, it is obvious that the trend of deterioration in the general psychological background, which began long before the “Wuhan crisis”, was reversed in 2021. On the other hand, the results of Russian studies show that today the nature of some key indicators of public opinion in Russia is much worse than, for example, in the U.S. and the UK. According to an international research conducted by the Institute for Socio-Political research under the Federal Center of Theoretical and

Table 4. Current dynamics of positive assessments of social mood in 2021 in various socio-demographic groups, % of respondents

Population group	Aug. 2020	Aug. 2021	Dynamics (+ / -)
Sex			
Men	55.6	65.6	+10
Women	57.3	69.8	+13
Age			
Under 30	69.0	82.3	+13
30–55	56.2	71.4	+15
Over 55	51.9	58.1	+6
Education			
Secondary and incomplete secondary	51.7	63.2	+12
Secondary vocational	59.1	68.5	+9
Higher and incomplete higher	58.6	73.0	+14
Income groups			
Bottom 20%	40.4	55.0	+15
Middle 60%	56.6	68.9	+12
Top 20%	76.4	86.7	+10
Territories			
Vologda	57.0	59.7	+3
Cherepovets	54.4	72.3	+18
Districts	57.5	70.1	+13
Oblast	56.5	67.9	+11

Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences⁴⁹, in Russia, the share of the following population groups is higher (*Insert 2*):

- ✓ those who are not satisfied with life in the country as a whole (41% vs. 37–38%);
- ✓ those who consider the economic situation in the country to be “tense, crisis-ridden, critical, explosive” (86% – in Russia, the same amount – in the UK; 73% – in the U.S.);
- ✓ those who point out very insufficient protection from possible economic shocks and crises (44% vs. 19–21%);
- ✓ those who are unsure about the future (64% vs. 37–38%).

✓ In addition, Russia is “ahead” of the UK and the U.S. in terms of the degree of urgency of almost all the problems listed in the survey for the population (except “the inability to go on vacation, to have a rest”). In the Russian Federation, there is a greater share of citizens whose life is complicated by the following factors:

- ✓ low income (66%);
- ✓ lack of prospects in life (37%);
- ✓ lack of a decent job (42%);
- ✓ difficulties related to obtaining medical care, purchasing medicines (39%);
- ✓ inability to improve housing conditions (32%);
- ✓ inability to provide children with a good education (21%);
- ✓ lack of security on the streets, in public places (21%);
- ✓ difficulties with the payment of loans (19%);
- ✓ poor ecology (18%).

⁴⁹ International sociological research: New threats and practices of overcoming them in the context of the pandemic, August 2020. Research team: N.M. Velikaya (head) N.I. Belova, M.S. Tsapko, T.V. Velikaya, E.V. Fadeeva, E.V. Zverev. Conducted within the framework of the Russian Science Foundation project no. 17-78-30029 “Cognitive mechanisms and discursive strategies for overcoming socio-cultural threats in historical dynamics: A multidisciplinary study”. The field study conducted by the method of semi-formalized interviews (online) in August–September 2020 covered 1,200 residents of four countries: UK, Italy, the Russian Federation and the United States. The sample population was built by the nested quota method, where the nest was represented by a country or region, observing the quota by gender and age (source: Torkunov A.V., Ryazantsev S.V., Levashov V.K. et al. *COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, implications, counteraction: Monograph*. Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2021. P. 59.

Insert 1

**Proportion of people who characterize their social mood as positive, in various social groups
(% of respondents; VoIRC RAS data)**

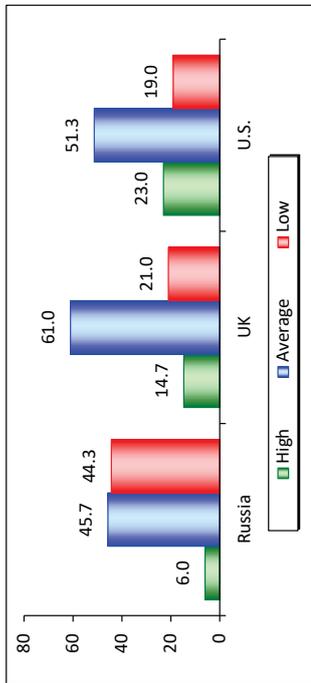
Population group	Dynamics of average annual data *						Current dynamics for the period from August 2020 to August 2021						Dynamics (+/-), Aug. 2021 to...			
	2000	2004	2008	2012	2018	2019	2020	2020	Aug. 2020	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020	Feb. 2021	Apr. 2021	June 2021	Aug. 2021	June 2021
	Sex															
Men	50.1	58.7	69.5	69.1	72.8	70.1	60.8	55.6	60.7	60.0	60.8	61.3	65.1	65.6	+10	+1
Women	43.3	53.8	65.0	65.8	69.8	69.6	61.2	57.3	60.8	59.8	59.2	64.9	66.7	69.8	+13	+3
	Age															
Under 30	59.1	64.3	74.6	72.3	80.0	81.1	67.6	69.0	64.6	65.2	60.9	67.4	73.0	82.3	+13	+9
30–55	44.2	54.8	68.5	67.9	72.6	71.2	61.8	56.2	62.5	60.9	64.4	65.5	70.0	71.4	+15	+1
Over 55	37.4	49.9	57.6	62.1	65.2	63.3	57.4	51.9	56.9	56.5	54.1	59.1	58.3	58.1	+6	0
	Education															
Secondary and incomplete secondary	41.7	49.9	61.6	57.2	64.8	63.2	56.1	51.7	56.9	52.6	56.2	56.9	62.5	63.2	+12	+1
Secondary vocational	46.4	56.9	67.5	66.7	72.2	72.7	63.5	59.1	63.5	62.5	60.9	64.3	66.1	68.5	+9	+2
Higher ad incomplete higher	53.3	61.8	72.6	77.0	76.8	73.4	63.3	58.6	61.4	64.6	62.7	68.7	69.7	73.0	+14	+3
	Income groups															
Bottom 20%	28.4	43.0	54.9	51.5	57.3	53.2	43.4	40.4	46.0	38.9	44.3	49.8	54.2	55.0	+15	+1
Middle 60%	45.5	55.8	67.1	68.7	71.9	71.4	62.6	56.6	61.9	63.3	60.1	65.8	67.0	68.9	+12	+2
Top 20%	64.6	69.9	77.3	81.1	82.9	81.8	75.6	76.4	70.6	76.3	76.0	70.8	76.5	86.7	+10	+10
	Territories															
Vologda	49.2	57.1	69.7	73.6	71.0	68.6	60.9	57.0	61.0	58.7	55.8	57.0	59.4	59.7	+3	0
Cherepovets	50.8	57.3	68.3	76.2	75.8	71.2	60.4	54.4	59.3	60.7	64.4	68.1	70.8	72.3	+18	+2
Districts	42.2	54.8	65.0	59.8	68.7	69.8	61.4	57.5	61.4	60.0	59.7	64.0	67.1	70.1	+13	+3
Oblast	46.2	56.0	67.0	67.3	71.2	69.9	61.0	56.5	60.7	59.9	59.9	63.3	66.0	67.9	+11	+2

* The table contains average annual data for the first year of each new presidential term and the annual dynamics since 2018.

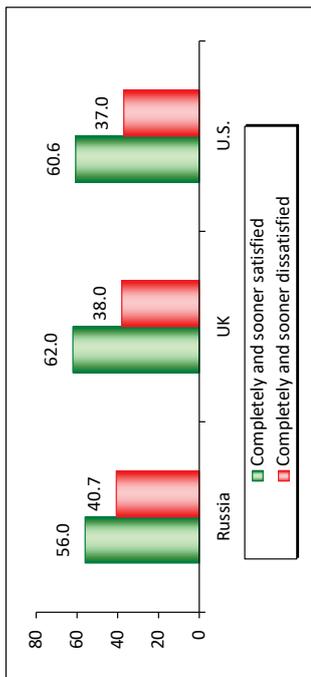
Insert 2

Key indicators of public opinion in Russia, the UK and the U.S. (2020), %

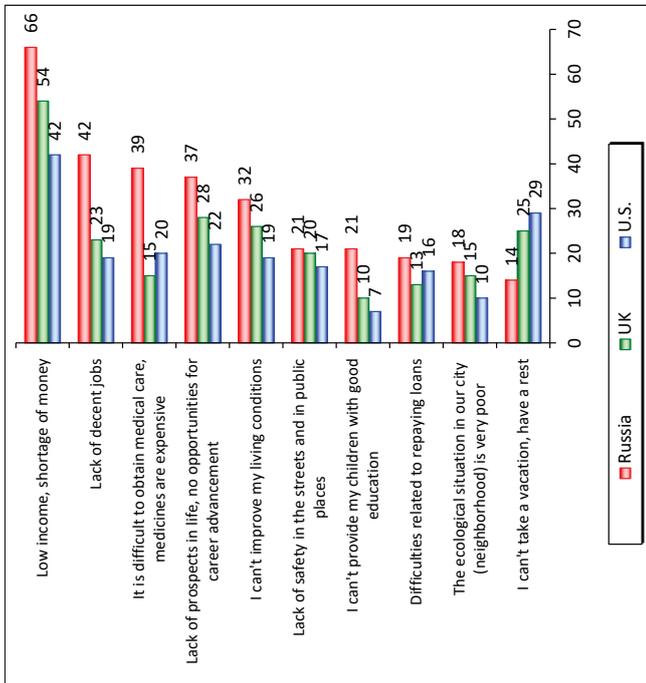
Assessment of the extent of safety from possible economic shocks and crises



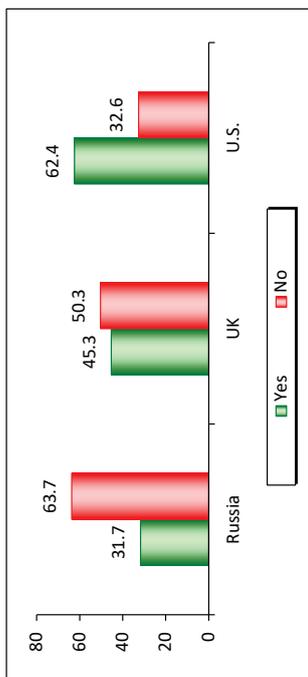
Satisfaction with life in the country



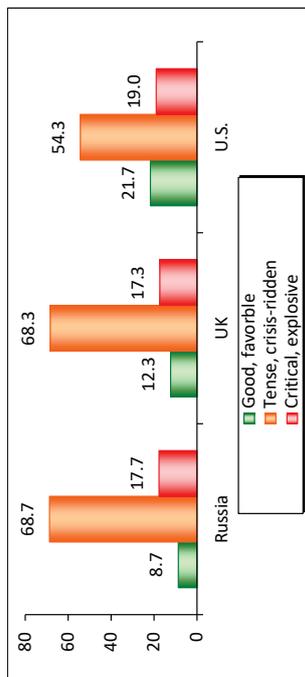
What makes your life or the life of your family especially difficult? (ranked according to the data for the Russian Federation)



Confidence in the future



Assessment of the economic situation



Source: Torkunov A.V., Ryzantsev S.V., Levashov V.K. et al. COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, implications, counteraction. Monograph. Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2021. 248 p.

Thus, the National Security Strategy of 2021 fully reflects the general nature of the entire political course implemented by the RF President. It records clear strengthening of Russia's sovereignty and its international standing.

“The Strategy-2021 defines a new world order without illusions and hopes for a return to the previous order. This is not only and not so much a recognition of the deep split in Russia's relations with the West. This is, in fact, a rejection of the possibility of addressing global issues on the basis of joint discussions and former global institutions like the UN and meetings of world leaders – something that Vladimir Putin regularly proposed even after 2014. For a long time, Russia remained the only country that hoped for a comprehensive search for anti-crisis solutions. And we are the last ones among those who freeze such tasks in the list of their national interests”⁵⁰.

In our opinion, it is extremely important that a new version of the National Security Strategy of Russia defines “strengthening traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, preserving the cultural and historical heritage of the people of Russia” as one of the national interests (Item III.25). Even despite the acute urgency and protracted nature of internal socio-economic issues, in the conditions of the continuing imposition of liberal-capitalist values by global elites and in the objective conditions of the need to “harness the wave” of technological changes, the problem of finding one's own independent, primarily spiritual and moral, path is particularly acute.

At the same time, the recent personnel changes taking place in the sphere of culture, science and education demonstrate the readiness of the head of state not only to declare the priority of spiritual and moral development, but also to support this guideline with real actions. In the framework of implementing the main provisions of the National Security Strategy, we can point out the following changes:

✓ **Change of the rector of the Higher School of Economics**, an institution that is considered “the major conductor of Western ideology to our country, the engine of liberal ideas”⁵¹. On July 1, 2021, rector of the Higher School of Economics (HSE) Ya. Kuzminov, who had held this position since 1992 and, as some experts note, was “the ideologist of the liberal bloc in the Cabinet of Ministers of the Russian Federation and a recognized gravedigger of education”, left his post⁵². His place was taken by N. Anisimov – former rector of the Far Eastern Federal University; according to some experts, he is “undoubtedly, a henchman of the Presidential administration”⁵³.

“Anisimov turned FEFU into one of the best universities in the country. The university is devoid of liberalism. It focuses on practice... It is also important to pay attention to the following point. Anisimov did not show any intention to promote cooperation with Western universities, research centers, NPOs, etc. FEFU has established excellent cooperation with China”⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Skorobogatyi P. Strategy based on one's own strength. *Ekspert*, 2021, no. 29, p. 52.

⁵¹ Goncharov A. Is HSE really the best Russian university? *Zavtra*, 2021, July 6. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/kuz_minov_dvinulsya_v_nauchnie_rukovoditeli_vishki

⁵² Ivanov A. The alma mater of liberal cadres has been beheaded. *Zavtra*, 2021, July 2. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/events/kuznitca_liberastnih_kadrov_obezglavlena

⁵³ Skrynnikova A., Yuzbekova I. “He is like a government official”: Why N. Anisimov became Rector of the HSE. Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/tehnologii/434335-kak-gosudarstvennyy-chinovnik-pochemu-rektorom-vshe-stal-nikita-anisimov>

⁵⁴ It finally happened. The HSE broke loose from the hands of the liberals. Available at: <https://www.putin-today.ru/archives/128506>

✓ ***Change of the President of the Russian Academy of Education (RAE).*** On June 30, 2021, this post was taken by O. Vasilyeva, who, according to a number of experts, “revives the best traditions of Russian education” and, probably, “will give a new impetus to the academia”⁵⁵.

A. Lubkov (Rector of Moscow Pedagogical State University): “As a minister, Olga Vasilyeva is doing a lot to revive the best traditions of Russian education. One of her first statements in office as head of the department that education is not a service, but a special mission of serving society and the state gave hope and inspired the improvement of the national higher and secondary schools and the possibility to overcome the crisis phenomena that have accumulated here over the past decades”⁵⁶.

It should also be noted that in the period of O. Vasilyeva’s work as the Minister of Education and Science (2016–2018), “the majority of Vasilyeva’s opponents were liberals from the Ministry of Education, who influenced the department since the days of former ministers A. Fursenko and D. Livanov”. “The positioning of Vasilyeva as a counterweight to the liberal public” was noted by E. Minchenko, director of Minchenko Consulting. According to D. Zhuravlev, Director General of the Institute for Regional Problems, “Olga Vasilyeva from the very beginning did not quite fit into the paradigm of the economic block of the government. She does not fully share the position that education is exclusively a service sector. She sees the main task of education as ideological education, not business”⁵⁷.

For reference. O. Vasilyeva’s opinion on some issues in the education system⁵⁸:

1. About the lessons of the basics of religion in schools:

“...As for spiritual and moral values, I am convinced that any culture, especially ours, is based on Christianity. The heritage that Christian culture has given us is being collected bit by bit up to this day. Every person needs to know this heritage, their personality will not be complete without it”.

2. About the possibility of introducing sex education lessons in school:

“I would advise parents to talk about this with their children. Without the help of one’s family, nothing will work out. I can hardly imagine that I would ask a teacher at school to talk to my child about this. There are some things that, in my opinion, are very sensitive, very subtle”.

3. About the politicization of schoolchildren:

“To be politicized, you need to know a lot. To date, the level of knowledge of history, literature, geography is quite low. If you bring some ideas to someone, they are often based on something. I admit that there is a place for teenage protest, which is always there. And sometimes adults use it. < ... > What kind of politicization can we talk about? Do they read philosophers en masse? Of course, they need to be educated and intellectually developed. Both at home and at school”.

⁵⁵ An opinion of M. Strikhanov, RAE Academician, Rector of the MEPhI National Research Nuclear University (source: The only right decision. *Kommersant*, 2021, June 28. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4877626>).

⁵⁶ Vasilyeva revives the best traditions of Russian education. *RIA-novosti*, 2020, January 13. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20200113/1563347621.html>.

⁵⁷ Zakharkin S., Gereykhanova A., Belyi M. Liberals use attacks in schools to remove Vasilyeva. *News Agency URA.RU*, 2018, January 22. Available at: <https://ura.news/articles/1036273645>

⁵⁸ *RBK*, December 24, 2019. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/24/12/2019/5e01c02e9a7947c99de3e918>

4. On the de-bureaucratization of the work of teachers:

“There should be four documents: a working program on the subject, a calendar and thematic plan, an electronic assignment notebook, and an electronic journal. Everything else should not bother the teacher... The teacher should not be burdened. Who needs stupid reporting? Nobody does”.

5. About the role of the textbook and the maintenance of a single educational space: “So how many textbooks do we need in order for the meanings forming a socio-cultural matrix to be minted in the minds of a child and a teenager, with the help of which our children will be able to realize and perceive their socio-cultural identity? I think that one or two cross-cutting subject lines would be enough; as children grow up, these lines can be supplemented with the study of numerous primary sources – written (literature, history), material (architecture, art), spiritual (faith, tradition)”⁵⁹.

✓ ***Establishment of the Interdepartmental Commission for Historical Education (July 30, 2021)***; its head is Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation V.R. Medinsky, whose goal is “to ensure a systematic and assertive approach to the issue of defending the national

interests of the Russian Federation related to the preservation of historical memory and the development of educational activities in the field of history”⁶¹.

Thus, we see that Vladimir Putin is implementing system-wide measures to withdraw the entire system of education and upbringing of the younger generations from the influence of liberal forces and puts it under the control and coordination of his own administration. It is obvious that this step (or rather, a whole set of specific personnel decisions) is aimed, first, at strengthening pro-state, patriotic, nationally oriented views, not only in individual institutions, but also in the entire Russian society (which is proclaimed as one of the key guidelines of the National Security Strategy-2021). Second, this is a “long-term game”, designed not only for the current youth, but primarily for the next generations of Russians; for the formation (perhaps in a few decades) of a stable priority of traditional spiritual and moral values in Russian society.

The main tasks of the Commission are⁶⁰:

a) to coordinate the work of state bodies and the scientific, educational and cultural community aimed at developing a unified approach to the implementation of historical education and awareness and preventing attempts to falsify historical facts;

b) to analyze the activities of foreign structures and persons that harm the national interests of the Russian Federation in the historical sphere, taking prompt measures to counteract such activities;

c) to prepare proposals for providing information support to counter-propaganda events and conducting historical and cultural educational actions related, among other things, to memorable dates of Russia and historic events.

⁵⁹ What will we use in teaching? (an interview with O. Vasilyeva). *Kommersant*, 2017, June 27. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3336330>

⁶⁰ On the Interdepartmental Commission for Historical Education: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation no. 442 of July 30, 2021. Available at: <http://prezident.org/articles/ukaz-prezidenta-rf-442-ot-30-iyulja-2021-goda-30-07-2021.html>

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

It is to this that we can link the measures undertaken by O. Vasilyeva aimed at reducing the diversity of textbooks (hence, the variability of interpretation of Russian history, traditional values, etc.); and the “assertive approach to the issue of defending the national interests of the Russian Federation”, proclaimed as one of the tasks of the new Interdepartmental Commission for Historical Education; and the recent statement of the Minister of Defense S. Shoigu (whom, as we recall, the President proposed as one of the leaders of United Russia in the upcoming State Duma election) that the imperceptible “decomposition” of Russian society is “a more terrible part” than external threats⁶²...

The contradictory nature of the National Security Strategy, which determines the priorities of national development for the next six years, causes equally contradictory expectations about the realism of a breakthrough development of the Russian economy, the standard of living and quality of life of the general population, and the possibility of overcoming social inequality and “crony capitalism”. However, one way or another, the political course that V. Putin started 20 years ago must be logically completed; today it is obvious that Russia simply does not have another historical path.

To do this, the head of state has two potential presidential terms at best, that is, almost 15 years, taking into account the period remaining until the presidential election of 2024. At the same time, if we take into

account the objective trend of increasing self-sufficiency of Russian society, it is obvious that the effectiveness of V. Putin’s political course must be proved annually, not only in formal reporting, but, above all, in subjective assessments of the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life of Russians.

The stagnation of contradictory realities and contradictory expectations of the population is likely to raise the discontent in society, exacerbate the level of social tension and skepticism about any, even the most optimistic, promises of the head of state.

And since the direct execution of the President’s instructions is directly related to the quality of the ruling elites and ideological motives that guide them, we cannot but agree with the point of view that the future of Russia is extremely questionable if the primary task – **overcoming the cynicism and lack of spirituality as the dominant feature of the ideology of the modern elite** – is not solved.

“It’s time to draw a conclusion. The modern Russian elite does not have any integral and formulated ideology at all... cynicism is the main feature of the ruling Russian elite.

If Putin has come to terms with the present elite, then state construction will not progress any further. This does not mean that everything is bad. **This means that it will hardly be better...** But if he is seriously thinking about the country, then we can talk about state construction seriously and responsibly. **And the first thing that is required for this is to replace the elite”⁶³.**

⁶² From the speech of S. Shoigu at the panel discussion of the All-Russian Youth Educational Forum “Territory of meanings”. In: Ivanov A. Shoigu named the worst threat to Russia. *Zavtra*, 2021, August 11. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/events/shoigu_nazval_strashnejshuyu_ugrozu_dlya_rossii

⁶³ Dugin A. Either today’s elite, or Russia. *Zavtra*, 2021, August 2. Available at: https://zavtra.ru/blogs/libo_segodnyashnyaya_elita_libo_rossiya

The personnel decisions made by the RF President are designed for a long-term strategic perspective – preservation of traditional values of patriotism, statehood, a high level of moral responsibility among those generations of Russians who have not even been enrolled in school today. In this regard, the National Security Strategy itself, and the steps taken by the President to implement it today, undoubtedly evoke positive feelings.

At the same time, there are also conflicting expectations, caused primarily by the fact that there is a threat that the national projects, the “May decrees”, the Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2018, the social guarantees provided for in the new Constitution of the Russian Federation and, in general, people’s needs for a dynamic increase in the standard of living and quality of life, overcoming social inequality and achieving social justice will not

be implemented, but shifted to the category of formal reporting, without producing any tangible positive changes in the dynamics of public opinion.

The National Security Strategy defines positive guidelines, but they are designed for the long term, and the implementation of the needs of society has been long overdue. Their implementation “here and now” is important to “ordinary” Russians. Therefore, questions and anxious expectations remain: will Vladimir Putin have enough time to finish what he started? What will have been achieved by 2024, when the next presidential election is to be held in Russia? Will the course he is pursuing continue after this milestone stage? And most importantly, will Russian society have enough patience to wait until the gradual transformation of the moral basis of the ruling elites is expressed in concrete, tangible steps aimed to improve the quality of life?

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