

Communicative Concept of the Social Contract and Formation of the Course of Economic Development



**Viktor E.
DEMENTIEV**

Central Economic Mathematical Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences
Moscow, Russian Federation
e-mail: dementev@cemi.rssi.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-5612-3999; ResearcherID: F-9252-2018

Abstract. The article presents the communicative concept of the social contract. This concept focuses not on reaching a compromise, but on bringing the parties closer together during the discussion of their positions. Mutual understanding regarding the desired future of the socio-economic system is a necessary basis for determining the course of economic development with a communicative understanding of the social contract. Such an interpretation of it takes into account that not only the image of the future is important, the process of its joint comprehension, the organizational aspect of this process is no less important. As evidenced by foreign practice, with standard procedures of electoral democracy, state policy is formed under the influence of business-oriented groups, and the influence of the preferences of an ordinary citizen is close to zero. Information technologies have not only dramatically expanded communication capabilities, but also led to the identification of the information elite. The article analyzes the discussion about the influence of this elite on social development, including the discussion of the theory of information autocracy. When mass media leads to increased polarization of society, it increases investment risks and causes a slowdown in economic growth. As foreign studies show, a new technological elite occupies a special position on topical issues of modern socio-economic development. The elite is interested not only in new technological and economic results, but also in social progress. The strong support of the high-tech elite for income redistribution and progressive taxation allows us to take a fresh look at the prospects for the convergence of the positions of social clusters regarding the course

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of economic development. The communicative concept of the social contract is a suitable basis for the synthesis of ideas of social clusterism and collaborative democracy.

Key words: social contract, course of economic development, information elite, technological elite, social clusterism, collaborative democracy.

Introduction

Germany, Japan, and South Korea managed to work an “economic miracle” after the wars. One would like this situation to be typical for Russia as well. Despite the importance of working out individual projects and programs, the key success factor in a market economy is the formation of institutions that ensure constructive cooperation of elites expressing the interests of the main social groups. As D. Rodrik points out, the analysis of industrial policy should focus not on its results, which are inherently unknowable in advance, but on the correct conduct of the political process. “We need to worry about how we create conditions in which private and public entities unite to solve problems in the production sector, while each side learns about the opportunities and limitations faced by the other, and not about whether, say, targeted lending or subsidies for R&D is the right instrument of industrial policy or whether we should promote the steel industry or the software industry” (Rodrik, 2004, p. 3).

The communicative understanding of the social contract is aimed at creating such conditions: “The justification of the existence of the state consists primarily not in the protection of equal subjective rights, but in ensuring an open process of forming public opinion and will, during which free and equal citizens reach mutual understanding about what goals and norms are of common interest to all of them. Thus, more is required from a citizen of a republican state than a constant focus on self-interest” (Habermas, 2001, p. 385).

Scientific research pays more and more attention to the agenda of social contract. According to Google Academy, in 2001–2020, about 16

thousand materials appeared every five years, in one way or another addressing this topic, while starting from 2021, 15,800 such publications were recorded in just two and a half years. Usually there is a contractual interpretation of the social contract, in which the agreement between the people and the state regarding the goals, means of achieving them, ideological support, the effectiveness of feedback and the participation of the people in the management of the affairs of society and the state appears as the result of a kind of bargaining, compromise of the parties. At the same time, we can talk about the balance of interests not only between the whole people and the authorities, but also between the strata that make up the people, social communities and groups (Toshchenko, 2023).

However, contractual relations allow, with formal equality of the parties, significant differences in their bargaining power, the possibility of manipulation by a weaker, less informed party. According to J. Rawls (1995), equality of initial positions is a necessary condition for choosing a fair social structure. In this regard, we can talk about the limitations of the contractual interpretation of the social contract in relation to Russian society, since justice is among its core values. “Russia has traditionally been a country in which the demand for social justice at all times of its development has been particularly acute and of particular importance” (Grechikhin, 2020, p. 14).

The communicative concept of the social contract focuses not on reaching a compromise, but on bringing the parties closer together during the discussion of their positions. The social contract appears not as a one-time act, but as a

continuous communicative process. The procedural aspect of this process is of great importance for maintaining mutual understanding in the changing circumstances of socio-economic development.

Mutual understanding is formed in conditions when “a) no one who wants to make a relevant contribution to the discussion can be excluded from among its participants; b) everyone is given equal chances to make their own considerations; c) the thoughts of the participants should not diverge from their words; d) communication should be free from external or internal coercion so that the positions of acceptance or nonacceptance regarding the criticized claims to significance are motivated solely by the power of persuasion of more weighty grounds” (Habermas, 2001, p. 115).

The communicative understanding of the social contract assumes that the course of economic development is determined and adjusted in accordance with the mutual understanding reached regarding the desired future of the socio-economic system and the way to achieve it. As Russian practice has shown, the contractual version of the social contract, focused on the obligations of government and business, does not provide the level of investment necessary for economic growth. This refers to the social contract in the wording “loyalty in exchange for stability”¹. Back in 2011 A.A. Auzan drew attention to the fact that the partners of the federal government “want to participate in making decisions about where the country is going. This is not necessarily political competition in the form in which it existed in the 1990s. It can be in other schemes and variants. But still, business, the active part of society, and regional and municipal authorities are not ready to invest if they do not have guarantees of their participation in decision-making. Therefore, the most preferable option for development is investment

in development in exchange for participation in decision-making”². We can conclude that the communicative version of the social contract is close to the needs of many Russian social actors.

As practice shows, countries where economic and political mechanisms meet such requests, where the preference for cooperation and competition is massive, are leaders in the life satisfaction index (happiness index) and are significantly ahead of other Western states, including the United States, in the development of economic and political institutions (Polterovich, 2022a; Polterovich, 2022b).

The war period is not the best time for discussions, but the very preparation for a public dialogue and discussion of its prospects are an important signal for everyone who considers changes within Russian society as a necessary condition for the country to achieve full national sovereignty and competitiveness in the 21st century. “Currently in Russia in the context of the SMO the prerequisites are being created for the formation of a new Social Contract, as well as new criteria for the coexistence and interaction of society and government, which will become relevant after all the goals of the special military operation have been achieved” (Ilyin, Morev, 2022, p. 9).

Some general contours of the future of Russia have already been outlined in the form of the determination to preserve traditional values while respecting the cultural identity of the peoples inhabiting the country. However, different solutions are possible within these boundaries, in particular with regard to economic policy. An attempt to outline the requirements for an updated social contract is presented in the work (Balatsky, Ekimova, 2022).

The elites are called upon to make a direct contribution to the search for a mutually acceptable image of the future for the whole society, which

¹ Alexander Auzan: Business expects guarantees of property rights from the social contract. Available at: <https://rg.ru/2011/08/09/business.html>

² Ibidem.

forms the basis of the social contract. This role of the elites corresponds to their very understanding. Thus, in the interpretation of J. Higley, elites are “individuals and groups that have the organizational potential for regular and strong influence on political decisions” (Higley, 2006, p. 24). The “narrow” interpretation of the elite corresponds to the political and administrative perspective of the analysis.

The understanding of the elite in the “broad” sense reflects the social stratification observed in any field of activity, when those who occupy the highest status positions in it (not necessarily formally fixed) are distinguished. As we know, the word “elite” corresponds to the French *élite* – the chosen one, the best, from Latin “*eligo*” – choose. According to this principle, in different spheres there are “communities of people who have received the highest index in their field of activity” (Pareto, 1995, p. 12).

The formation of an image of the future acceptable for the whole society is important not only for the purpose of more accurate forecasting of the achievability of personal goals or making appropriate strategic decisions. It serves to increase institutional and interpersonal trust, and accumulation of social capital. The formation of an image of the future uniting society is also the strengthening of the social identity of the country’s population. The communicative interpretation of the social contract takes into account that not only the image of the future is important, but also the process of its joint comprehension, coordination of the views of the parties involved, and their willingness to negotiate under changing conditions. Developing an image of the future that suits different groups is a fundamental step in achieving social justice, and with it national security.

An important aspect of the argument in favor of the communicative concept of the social contract is the analysis of the extent to which the interests of

citizens are taken into account by other concepts of public policy formation, including standard procedures for electoral democracy.

What opportunities and risks for the formation of the collective will of different social groups are associated with the development of modern communication technologies? What impact can the formation of an elite associated with digital technologies have on the prospect of transition to a communicative version of the social contract? These technologies appear among the factors prompting the renewal of the terms of the social contract. “The changes caused by digitalization are so radical that people have to rethink the old rules of social coexistence. In other words, a new stage of digital transformation of society implies a revision of the terms of the social contract” (Mikhaylenok, Malysheva, 2021, p. 36).

Review of modern literature

The work (Gilens, Page, 2014) presents the results of an empirical analysis of four theoretical concepts regarding whose interests are reflected by public policy. The empirical basis of the study was the materials of 1779 national surveys in the period from 1981 to 2002, when the general public of the United States was asked the question regarding their approval or disapproval of the proposed policy change. The following interpretations of the political process were compared: majoritarian electoral democracy, according to which the policy of the U.S. government is subordinated to the collective will of citizens, revealed as a result of democratic elections; the concept of dominance of the economic elite, which claims that people with significant economic resources play the main role in policy formation; the concept of majoritarian pluralism, which considers governmental policy as the result of rivalry between different interest groups; the concept of biased pluralism, taking into account the different “weight categories” of such groups.

A comparison of the concepts under consideration shows that public policy is influenced by the preferences of economic elites and the positions of organized interest groups, and the influence of the preferences of the average American is close to zero. M. Gilens and B. Page revealed that the common positions of the most influential, business-oriented groups are negatively related to the wishes of the average citizen. These results contrast with the conclusions of previous studies, which claimed that the policy of the U.S. federal government is consistent with the preferences of the majority of citizens in about two-thirds of cases (Monroe, 1998; Erikson et al., 2001). However, none of them evaluated the influence of variables such as the preferences of rich people or the preferences and actions of organized interest groups.

The work (Gilens, Page, 2014) gives some projection of the results obtained on practical interests: the authors express doubt that economic elites and leaders of interest groups know better which policy will benefit everyone: “Undoubtedly, wealthy Americans and corporate executives tend to know a lot about tax and regulatory policies that directly affect them. But how much do they know about the impact of social security, medical care, food stamps, or unemployment insurance, none of which is likely to be crucial to their own well-being? Most importantly, we see no reason to believe that information competence is always accompanied by a tendency to go beyond one’s own interests or a determination to work for the common good. In general, we believe that the public is likely to be a more confident defender of its own interests than any possible alternative” (Gilens, Page, 2014, p. 576).

R. Holcombe (Holcombe, 2021) in his article actually contradicts the above assessment of the public, but in relation to the preferences of citizens in the political sphere. He examines the factors influencing political preferences of the masses, and concludes that people adopt political

preferences imposed on them by the political elite. One explanation for this is that people do not independently develop their political preferences on individual issues. Rather, they form anchor preferences that determine their political orientation. Having become attached to the political party that best matches their anchor preferences, people tend to accept the rest of that party’s platform as derived preferences (Holcombe, 2023). To reduce cognitive dissonance, people readily accept information that supports their anchor and tend to reject information that calls it into question (Mullainathan, Washington, 2009). Voters who have little incentive to collect information on their own often follow the recommendations of the interest groups with which they identify themselves. People want to fit into the society of their friends and therefore tend to adopt the political preferences of their peer groups (Chen, Urminsky, 2019). In addition, people can vote for candidates and policies that promote the redistribution of public funds in favor of the poor, even if these voters are unfriendly and would not give money to the poor themselves. Voting to help the less fortunate brings such voters moral satisfaction and does not require any material costs from them (Holcombe, 2021).

An example of a narrow interpretation of the economic interests of political power and its leader is the theory of information autocracy, presented in articles by S. Guriev and D. Treisman (Guriev, Treisman, 2019; Guriev, Treisman, 2020). The gap between the “informed elite” and the general public in knowledge about the real state of affairs is a key element of this theory, where the leader is contrasted with the “informed elite” who follows them, and the general public who does not. According to this theory, the leader’s position depends on two variables – the number of the informed elite and the ease with which, given the technological capabilities, the state is able to monopolize the media. Both variables are related to the level of the country’s economic development. “In highly

developed modern countries, the informed elite is usually too numerous for manipulation to work, and censorship of all private media is expensive: democracy is the only option” (Guriev, Treisman, 2019, pp. 16–17). However, in practice, this provision of the theory of information autocracy is most impressively violated in highly developed modern countries. In the USA and Western Europe, there is currently an almost complete blockade in the media on opinions that are not desirable to the official course of governments.

S. Guriev and D. Treisman actually postulate that in the model of information autocracy, an official does not try to improve the work of the state apparatus, but only seeks to influence public opinion by manipulating information. It is said that the leader does not benefit from GDP growth directly, but only by increasing resources to finance propaganda, co-optation of the informed elite, censorship and/or repression (Guriev, Treisman, 2020).

Although the theory of information autocracy has become quite popular, its interpretation of the activities of leaders, whom S. Guriev and D. Treisman refer to as authoritarian, remains overly simplified. Such leaders include, in particular, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Lee Kuan Yew, Hugo Chávez, Viktor Orbán. Presenting them as people concerned solely with maintaining their positions of power is highly debatable. Professor A. Przeworski of New York University (Przeworski, 2022) has already drawn attention to this. In his opinion, it is difficult for Democrats to understand the very idea that authoritarian regimes can enjoy popular support. “Unless they are “brainwashed” or “indoctrinated,” how can people conceivably support an autocrat? Autocracies are assumed to be inherently brittle, surviving only because people are misled or repressed... Certainly, all actions by government officials have some effects of regime stability. But this does not mean that all their actions are motivated by the drive to survive in power”

(Przeworski, 2022, p. 1). The point is that the theory of information autocracy ignores the efforts of rulers to provide what people value. A. Przeworski asks: “Is it irrelevant that average Chinese incomes increased sixfold since 1978?” He points to the ideological bias of the theory of information autocracy. “The very idea that autocracies may enjoy popular support is hard to fathom for democrats” (Przeworski, 2022, p. 2).

The presence of different points of view in the information field is not necessarily a threat to the authorities. This is evidenced by the results of a study carried out on Russian materials. Based on the conducted experiments, it is shown that independent media contribute to the polarization of society (Enikolopov et al., 2022). It was found that access to free online media increases both the turnout of supporters of the regime for the elections and the number of votes for the ruling party in constituencies where support was quite high. While polarization is often considered detrimental to the stability of existing democracies (Abramowitz, McCoy, 2019), in autocracies the effect may be the opposite (Enikolopov et al., 2022, p. 23). In fact, it is confirmed that messages aimed at consumers with polar preferences can have the opposite effect, reinforcing existing preferences rather than canceling them (Lord et al., 1979; Ditto, Lopez, 1992). A similar conclusion about the possibility of a positive influence of independent foreign media on the state of the autocratic regime is contained in (Kern, Hainmueller, 2009).

It is important, however, to take into account the impact of polarization of society, confrontation of elites on the pace of economic development. The paper (Azzimonti, 2011) presents a model showing how disagreements over the structure of spending in a polarized and politically unstable society lead to a slowdown in economic growth. In this model, a formalized explanation is obtained for such empirical conclusions by W. Easterly and R. Levine (Easterly, Levine 1997) and R. Barro

(Barro, 1991). With a strong polarization of society, the policy of the current government is largely dictated by political uncertainty and the prospect of losing power positions. Hence the desire to accelerate the satisfaction of the financial needs of one's own electorate, even at the expense of the prospects for economic development, at the cost of reducing investment. The more disagreements reflected by the degree of polarization, the more short-sightedness is manifested in the policy choice of the current government (Azzimonti, 2011, p. 2202).

D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson showed that political elites can block technological and institutional development due to the "political replacement effect", fearing their displacement from positions of power by the new elite. It is argued that in the presence of political competition, elites are unlikely to block development. However, the higher the political stakes, the more likely is the blocking (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2002). This result is further evidence that the strong polarization of society has a negative impact on investment and innovation.

A leader with ambitious plans for the development of the country has to deal not only with their supporters, but also with groups that are satisfied with the status quo and do not feel the desire for change, and nostalgic for the lost power. When the activities of such groups are aimed at polarizing society, the leader is faced with a choice: try to contain this polarization or sacrifice their own plans.

The observed decrease in the participation of citizens in elections, decline in confidence in political institutions, intensification of protest movements and mass riots indicate the crisis of modern Western democracy based on interparty competition (Polterovich, 2021). The analysis of a number of transformations taking place in Western countries and serving to overcome this crisis has become the basis for the formation of the concept of collaborative democracy. Polterovich defines a

representative system of political decision-making as a collaborative democracy if it: a) provides voters with access to the decision-making process and broad opportunities for choice; b) provides for decision-making based on cooperation; c) is aimed at finding effective solutions close to consensus; d) relies on expert assessments and is protected from becoming an ochlocracy (Polterovich, 2021).

The requirement contained in item (c) to search for consensus solutions presupposes the active use of consensus political institutions (Polterovich, 2022a) and is the basis for presenting collaborative democracy as consensual. The approach to rapprochement of the parties during the discussion of their positions allows us to consider collaborative democracy as the embodiment of the communicative concept of the social contract.

Digital technology and the views of the high-tech elite

Technological development leads to the fact that new resources claim to be the key factor of production, and the owners of these resources claim to be the ruling elite. Currently, radical changes in the technological base of the economy are associated with digital technology. The owners of huge digital companies have already noticeably pushed the financial and fuel and energy elite on the economic Olympus. What are we to expect from the new elite? What are its preferences? The answers to these questions are important not only for the economy.

Digital technology has radically changed the information sphere. Electronic media, information and communication platforms play an important role in this area. The example of Alphabet Inc., which manages Google Inc. and its subsidiaries, shows the desire of the information elite to diversify its business. In addition to various services on the Internet, Google's activities cover, in particular, the sale of goods under the brands Fitbit (smart watches), Google Nest (household goods) and Pixel (electronics).

In the theory of information autocracy, the information elite is presented in a very simplified form, in fact without its own power ambitions. Its representatives either serve the autocrat, or track his mistakes and abuses and inform the public about them. Attention is not paid to the willingness of the elite to manipulate information, to introduce its own censorship not only for the sake of the current government, but also to the detriment of it, based on its own interests. The information elite, not co-opted by the authorities, is represented in (Guriev, Treisman, 2020) as a champion of democracy.

This elite appears in a completely different image in the book by A. Bard and J. Söderqvist (Bard, Söderqvist, 2004). In the theory of information autocracy the multiplication of information channels leads to an increase in the democratic orientation of social development, while in the concept of netocracy it is expected that the crisis of democracy will have a fatal outcome, and the information network will act more like an old woman with a scythe than a knight in shining armor. According to this concept, the idea that the transparency of the network will increase the openness of society and the full implementation of the principles of democracy at all levels, that information will be equally accessible to all network participants and they will have equal opportunities for influence, should be considered nothing more than netocratic propaganda.

A. Bard and J. Söderqvist write about a new power hierarchy in the information society, the hierarchy organized on the basis of membership in various networks. In their opinion, at the lower level of this pyramid there is a consumtariat – those who only consume information. Its role in production processes is auxiliary. The process of consumption of production goods is regulated by a higher level; desires are prompted by advertising. The inspired attitude toward self-expression as the goal of being forms the masses that are focused on their own

problems and not interested in the world order. A hierarchy of networks with increasingly restricted access rises above the consummate network, filled with information garbage that distracts from what is important. The decisive factor controlling an individual's position in this hierarchy is their attractiveness to the network, that is, the ability to absorb, sort, evaluate and generate attention to themselves and valuable information. At the top of the hierarchy are those who make up the ruling class of the netocrats, who are most adept at owning attention as the most valuable resource in the new world. The appropriation of attention appears as a new meaning of exploitation, and knowledge of the true state of things is a privilege of the netocracy and one of the foundations of its power. The lack of attention to the fact that the information elite is also a high-tech elite brings the concept of netocracy closer to the theory of information autocracy.

We should note that the allocation of several levels of the information pyramid in the concept of netocracy reflects the practice of increasing the efficiency of information manipulation. Opinion leaders can act as an intermediate level between netocrats and the consumtariat. They not only help to perceive the transmitted information, but also give it greater credibility.

A. Bard and J. Söderqvist are not enthusiastic about the decline of democracy and do not assume the role of capitulators or fatalists. In the preface to their book, they note: “Granted, in any conditions, it is possible to find a way to influence the course of social development to one degree or another, but only based on a more or less adequate model of such development. Good intentions are powerless by themselves. Opportunities to influence the course of events will appear only if we are able to create a sufficiently detailed and at the same time unbiased model of what are the objective historical prerequisites and the inner nature of the phenomena gaining strength” (Bard, Söderqvist, 2004, p. 2).

Presented by A. Bard and J. Söderqvist back in 2000³, the picture of the development of the information sphere is close to what appears in modern literature as surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2015), platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2016). In all these concepts, asymmetry in knowledge (“information is the new oil”) leads to asymmetry in power.

The activities of information and communication platforms are not limited to the role of intermediaries. Facebook not only unites more people than any one country on this planet controls, but also “knows more about voters’ personal preferences, political engagement and psychographic trigger points than many governments in this world” (Helberger, 2020, p. 842). Such knowledge turns platforms into holders of significant political power over public opinion. Back in 2007, M. Castells drew attention to the fact that “politics is based on socialized communication, on the ability to influence people’s minds” (Castells, 2007, p. 240).

In the work (Helberger, 2020, p. 849) it is stated that “currently, in Europe, there are no proposals on the table to set limits to how far platforms may go in using AI, algorithms and the data they collect to persuade and abuse that power for own political purposes”. Attempts to introduce certain standards of social responsibility of platforms further strengthen the influence of these platforms on public opinion and, consequently, their political power.

In such conditions, special importance is attached to the studies that do not consider the economic elite as homogeneous, but are aimed at identifying the views of the new technological elite on topical issues of modern socio-economic development. These studies actually serve to form a model of objective historical prerequisites and the inner nature of the phenomena gaining strength; this was advocated by A. Bard and J. Söderqvist.

³ The book by A. Bard and J. Söderqvist was published in Swedish in 2000.

Tech entrepreneurs have already used their opportunities to influence U.S. politics. For example, in 2012, Google and other Internet companies asked their websites’ visitors to contact Congress to oppose the Stop Online Piracy Act, which would make them responsible for posting content that violates copyrights. Congress has faced a flood of appeals, as a result of which Congressional support for the bill has come to naught (Broockman et al., 2019).

Research results show that U.S. tech entrepreneurs (Apple, Amazon, Alphabet/Google, Microsoft, Facebook, etc.) adhere to a special set of views unusual for any other mass or elite group. In the work (Broockman et al., 2019), based on the conducted surveys, the opinion of the high-tech elite is presented in four policy areas: redistribution, regulation, globalization and social issues.

Tech entrepreneurs are strongly committed to globalization, support free trade agreements (87%), and advocate for an increase in immigration (56%). Among tech entrepreneurs who participated in the survey, 61.3% identify themselves as Democrats compared to only 14.1% who identify themselves as Republicans.

Tech entrepreneurs almost unanimously support same-sex marriage (96%), are in favor of gun control (82%) and against the death penalty (67%), consider abortion as a matter of personal choice (79%).

Such entrepreneurs strongly support redistribution and progressive taxation. Almost all of them are in favor of raising taxes for those who earn more than \$250,000 or \$1,000,000 a year, 75% support federal spending on programs that benefit only the poor, and 59% believe that such spending should be increased, 82% stated the need for universal health care, even if it means higher taxes.

Despite their liberalism in matters of economic redistribution, technology entrepreneurs are very conservative in matters of government regulation. They are less likely than Democrats to support regulation of commodity markets and are much

more likely to believe that government regulation of business does more harm than good. Their conservative views on issues related to trade unions and labor market regulation are very similar to the views of Republicans. The combination of conservative views of technology entrepreneurs on regulation and liberal views on economic redistribution is unique.

These observations allow us to imagine the possible evolution of the policy of the U.S. Democratic Party under the influence of tech entrepreneurs, and in this regard, the evolution of American politics as a whole. Students specializing in computer science already hold much the same views as the founders of tech companies.

The conclusion that members of the tech elite adhere to similar worldviews and clearly form a separate faction of the capitalist class was confirmed in a study that was no longer limited to U.S. entrepreneurs, but focused on Forbes 100 richest people in the world in the field of high technology (Brockmann et al., 2021). Those who got on the Forbes list earned their money mainly on computer programs, hardware and Internet-related technologies and services. Half of the 100 largest technology billionaires are representatives of the USA, 5 – Canada, 5 – Europe, 17 – China, 3 – Hong Kong, 7 – other parts of East Asia: South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Singapore. Three are entrepreneurs from Israel, two from India, two from

Australia, one from Brazil and one from Russia. The study showed that the 100 richest representatives of the world of technology demonstrate special views that distinguish them from the general population and other wealthy elites. Since the companies they have created occupy a dominant position in the emerging technology-based economy, the views of the high-tech elite have a great influence on how economic resources are spent. It is suggested that, despite the concern about money as a measure of success, the technological elite seems to really have strong positive feelings toward the idea of “making the world a better place”. The argument is that sixty technology entrepreneurs from the sample under consideration have charitable foundations that maintain their own websites (Brockmann et al., 2021). To what extent such actions are self-valuable for the technological elite, to what extent they are designed to weaken the resistance to change on the part of the old elite, the future will show.

Conclusion

The advantages of collaborative democracy presented in the works (Polterovich, 2022a, Polterovich, 2022b) can be supplemented by a higher stability of the economy in a turbulent economic environment, which was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic by a group of countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Switzerland and the Netherlands) that gravitate toward this management system (*Table*).

GDP dynamics in 2020–2022, %

Country	2020	2021	2022
Denmark	-1.99	4.86	3.82
Norway	-1.28	3.90	3.28
Sweden	-2.17	5.39	2.64
Finland	-2.35	3.05	2.08
Iceland	-7.24	4.33	6.44
Switzerland	-2.38	4.22	2.06
The Netherlands	-3.89	4.86	4.48
European Union	-5.67	5.47	3.54
UK	-11.03	7.60	4.10
OECD countries	-4.21	5.47	2.78

Source: World Development Indicators.

The cumulative decline in GDP for this group of countries in 2020 was 2.6%, which is more than twice less than in the European Union as a whole.

During large-scale structural shifts in the economy, uncertainty about the future is fuelled by a significant difference in the views of the elites on it. In such conditions, of particular importance is the joint understanding of the prospects for the development of the country by the Russian elites. Despite the attractiveness of direct participation of citizens in decision-making, in order to prevent the polarization of the options put to the vote, it is advisable to bring the positions of opinion leaders and the existing elites closer together. The concept of social clusterism focuses on achieving a balance of their interests (Makarov, 2010). Taking into account the above, it is necessary to identify subclusters within the business cluster.

The involvement of cluster elites in the search for consensus solutions opens up the prospect of addressing two of the most important and related difficulties of collaborative management. We are talking about the complexity of organizing a productive discussion between millions of agents and the need for a high level of competence for effective government decision-making (Polterovich, 2021).

The cooperation of the elites of social clusters does not mean that the issue concerning direct voting and the voting within clusters can be withdrawn from the agenda. An important warning is the argument presented in (López, Dubrow, 2020) that the reproduction of political inequality within countries and over time is the result of two key interrelated mechanisms: the coordination of elites and the discoordination of the masses.

Under any management system, there is a danger of its degeneration, erosion of the original principles. R. Michels drew attention to this back in 1911 when he formulated the “iron law of oligarchy” (Michels, 2001). When the basis of a social contract is a general recognition of the need for mutual understanding of all parties, such

recognition should be confirmed and implemented within the framework of regular practice. This is the meaning of interpreting a communicative social contract as a process rather than a one-time act. In order for the coordination of the interests of social clusters not to be replaced by the coordination of the interests of elites, it is necessary to expand the direct participation of citizens in decision-making, including regular referendums on the most important issues. At the same time, the role of experts called upon to analyze and explain to citizens the possible consequences of certain decisions is increasing (Polterovich, 2021).

According to E. Ostrom, effective joint activity requires a certain community of interests. In the successful self-governing institutions she has studied, people have a common past and expect to share a future. It is important for them to maintain their reputation as reliable members of the community (Ostrom, 2013).

As studies of the foreign high-tech elite show, they are interested not only in new technological and economic results, but also in social progress. The fact that this elite advocates for redistribution and progressive taxation allows us to take a fresh look at the possibilities of reducing the differentiation of social clusters by income. It can be expected that the ambitions of Russian business in the field of high technology will eventually go increasingly beyond the pursuit of profit. It is to be hoped that the approval of some inclusive cultural innovations will remain the specifics of the U.S. high-tech elite.

Business is forced to respond to the measures of the state economic policy. However, their support for the country’s economic development course will become more active if this course is developed with the direct participation of business along with other social clusters. Moreover, such a joint formation of an economic course will not be reduced to the clusters bargaining for some concessions from the government.

The elites' preliminary formulation of ideas about the country's future for the medium and long term can be useful to accelerate the development of a joint strategy for national socio-economic development. At the same time, it is important to have the initial attitude that the formation of collective will is associated with a change in the initial preferences of the parties and their plans for the future. Political institutions are designed to add this to the process of forming collective will (Florida, 2013). When armchair strategies developed outside of the presented process claim to express such a will, it looks like a request for the transfer of power to a meritocracy. Currently, the concept of meritocracy is questioned in many articles and books (Frank 2016; Littler 2017; Markovits, 2019). As critics of the meritocratic formulation of "equality of opportunity" point out, it has a positive meaning, but serves plutocrats as a cover for inequality. "Whilst the existence of elites is hardly new, what is to some degree more historically novel is the extent to which large sections of today's plutocracy feels the need to pretend they are not an elite at all" (Littler, 2017, p. 115). This tactic

is successful: "The more unequal a society, the more likely its citizens are to explain success in meritocratic terms, and the less important they deem nonmeritocratic factors such as a person's family wealth and connections" (Mijs, 2021, p. 7).

Diligence in studies increases the chances of getting a high-paying job, but 22 of the 100 richest representatives of the world's high-tech elite have never studied at college or university (Brockmann et al., 2021). People experience severe psychological stress when there is an imbalance between the dominant and pervasive ideology of meritocracy and their efforts to climb the social ladder through hard work (Garrison et al., 2021).

It is possible to put "equality of results" above "equality of opportunity" (Littler, 2017), taking into account that wealth is not a universal measure of results. The concept of social clusterism allows for the joint elaboration of a development strategy, the coordination of the interests of clusters, when each of them is guided by their own understanding of the results. The communicative concept of social contract is a suitable basis for the synthesis of ideas of social clusterism and collaborative democracy.

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Information about the Author

Viktor E. Dementiev – Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor, RAS Corresponding Member, Chief Researcher, Central Economic Mathematical Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences (47, Nakhimovskiy Avenue, Moscow, 117418, Russian Federation; e-mail: dementev@cemi.rssi.ru)

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