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Vladimir Putin, His Discourses and the Russian Reality (Democracy in Russia: Does It Have the Future?).

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Vladimir Putin

His Discourses and the Reality of Russia

(Democracy in Russia: What Future Does It Have?)

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SUMMARY

The following work will analyze the political discourses of Mr. Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, from the day of his inauguration, May 7, 2000, to the present in order to discover the relationship between the speeches and the course of democracy the country is heading to (if it will be the case). In other words, the main objective of this Project is to follow up on the transition to democracy through one dimension of politics, which is the democratic culture as it is reflected in political leaders.

For the purposes of this investigation, the important political discourses of Putin will be selected according to these criteria:

1. have to address the question of nationalism or universalism
2. have to address the question of democracy or authoritarianism
3. have to address the issues of liberties (religious or political)
4. have to address the historical past of Russia

The discourses will be then analyzed as to how they add to the construction of the Russian political culture and, most importantly, how they check upon the democratic system developing in the country. Therefore, the project will assess the evolution of Mr. Putin's speeches during his presidency from his inaugural noble proclamation to “want Russia to be free, prosperous,

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wealthy, strong, and civilized land, a land in which its citizens take pride and which commands respect in the world”¹ to the present day in attempt to find the constant elements and determine their importance for the discourses.

The author of this Project has spent three months in Russia, from June, 2004, to September, 2004, in order to collect the latest information on the subject and the most recent authentic bibliographical sources available. Russian cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Omsk, and Kyrgan were visited personally. All materials printed in the Russian language were translated by the author of this Project. The picture presented in the Project was taken by the author in Omsk, Russia, in August, 2004.

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Introduction

“Yes-No” Game of the Russian Politics

“I do not even know what they can write. I would not have been able to write this much about myself.”

On books written about Putin. In the interview with Bulgarian journalists.²

A stranger to the Russian politics, a foreigner who simply picked up the daily newspaper to inform himself or herself about the events happening in the political field of the Russian

¹ Putin, V. Inaugural speech. Press release of the press service of the President of the Russian Federation. Kremlin, Moscow, May 7, 2000. www.russianembassy.org/RUSSIA/Speech-president.htm

² ITAR-TASS, 28.02.2003, in *Putinki: Kratkii Sbornik Izrechenii Prezidenta (Pervii Srok)*. (*Putinki: A Brief Collection of the Quotations of the President (The First Term)*). EcoBook: Moscow, 2004, p. 65. From here on all translations from Russian are mine.

Federation may never really get the true picture: it is because often a categorical “no” from a politician in reality will mean “yes” and vice versa in this country. That makes it very difficult to predict the line of action of the government or political parties and virtually destroys any rules of the game built in this yet weak democratic society. The highest political leader, the president, sets the tone for this uncertainty. For instance, the President Putin critically advises the Central Bank of the country this year: “I ask you to act with care. There will not be any massive cleanings of the banking system for the moment, I do not think?”³ However, the newspaper *Arguments and Facts* interpreted this as the opposite: the attack on the banks will certainly take place and bank analysts are already in panic.⁴

In other cases the President Putin does not appear to take either side; he desires to remain neutral to a possible conflict. However, in the end, though many of his speeches are of a neutral character, his later actions or orders depict the reality of the situation and his decisions for or against an issue. Such was the picture in March, 2003, related to the Ministry of the Internal Affairs of Russia. The audience could not even imagine any crucial changes in the Ministry from Putin’s speeches before March of 2003.

Nevertheless, on March 11, 2003, he announces a series of new laws which led to serious changes in FSB (former KGB) services and the creation of Governmental Narcotics Control Service (Gosnarkocontrol).

This example is another variation of a yes-no political game where the decisions are thought through but not announced to the public. In this scenario with the Ministry of Internal Affairs Putin also promised that “there would be no revolutions” in the services. Instead, the Ministry was completely reformed: as a result of those new orders, the Ministry lost its special divisions of narcotics crimes and had to begin dealing with taxation issues and tax evasion crimes.⁵ Overall, then, Putin fits well in to the chain of previous Russian leaders for this yes-no political games and schemes have always been so typical of the Russian political arena.

Thus Russia remains hardly predictable to the rest of the world even when the terms such as free markets and democracy finally found their place in the Russian lifestyle. As Henry Kissinger once noted, “Russia was neither the part of the democratic world as the United States or Germany, nor “the world of balance” as Japan or China, more likely, it is the part of “the changing world...”⁶ Or so it was until the second president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, took reins in his hands in 2000.

³ *Arguments and Facts*. June 2004, N. 25 (1234), p. 2.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Barinov, A. and Shvarev, A. in *Chetire Goda s Putinim. (Four Years with Putin)*. Vremia: Moscow, 2004, p. 209.

⁶ In *Chetire Goda s Putinim. (Four Years with Putin)*. Vremia: Moscow, 2004, p. 27.

Today, in 2004, Putin won again with the 70 percent support of the voters and it seems that vulnerability gives place to some stability in this nation.

Therefore, what the leadership of Putin was and what it meant for the country is the main area of study of this research project. His words, his formal appearances on television and radio, his speeches and interviews will be analyzed in attempt to understand not so much as “who is Mr. Putin?” but rather “where Mr. Putin leads his country and his people”.

CHAPTER 1

Democracy vs. Constitutional Monarchy

Political analysts from around the world often ponder about the democratic development in Russia, in unison repeating that it will be some own special way.⁷ Current President Vladimir Putin inherited from Boris Yeltsin a monarchical, paternalistic “Russian System”⁸ of one-man rule. As Shevtsova points out, Putin found himself in the Yeltsin’s trap of what O’Donnell calls “a delegative democracy”, a system of power based on a principle that “whoever was elected to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit”.⁹ And the citizens definitely supported this type of government for over 71 percent desired “a strong leader” first and foremost, 59 percent wanted “a strong state”, and only 13 percent needed democratic institutions as of the year 2000.¹⁰

Thus, electing Putin as their president, people were voting primarily for stability as they were tired of the Yeltsin’s uncontrollable past.¹¹ Then it is not surprising that Putin’s presidential years were named the period of “controllable democracy”¹², a kind of semi authoritarian regime with easily managed Duma (the Russian Congress). It has also been called “an autocratic presidency” with false pluralism in the party system.¹³ All together, Putin governs under the bureaucratic order where apparatism, subordination, loyalty, and top-down approach prevail over the legality of law and order. Hence, in this project let us carefully analyze various aspects of Putin’s leadership in order to understand the Russian political development of today and attempt to predict the country’s future when the next political leader will take his turn in the year 2008.¹⁴

⁷ For more on the transition to a democracy in Russia see McFaul, M., Petrov, N. and Ryabov, A. *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform*.

⁸ Shevtsova, L. *Putin’s Russia*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, D.C., 2003.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 65.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 73.

¹¹ On Yeltsin’s presidency see Shevtsova, L. *Yeltsin’s Russia: Myths and Reality*.

¹² Shevtsova, L. *Putin’s Russia*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 129.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 189.

¹⁴ For more on post-communist democracies see O’Donnell, “Acerca del estado, la democratization y algunos problemas conceptuales, una perspectiva latinoamericana con referencias a paises poscomunistas”. (“About the state, democratization and some conceptual problems, a Latin American perspective with references to postcommunist countries”). *Desarrollo Económico-Revista de Ciencias Sociales*. IDES, Buenos Aires, vol. 33, n. 130, July-Septiembre 1993.

However, this issue first of all concerns the Russian people themselves for the future of their country is at stake. During the direct phone line with the President in December, 2002, the population could call and ask any questions so that the whole nation would hear the responses Mr. Putin would give. As the calls were thoroughly analyzed for statistical and political purposes, one of the main areas was the subject of democracy.

In particular, the call of Demid Mitrofanov got through from the province of Rostov. He asked whether it is possible that the constitutional monarchy be established in Russia with time. The immediate reply of the President was as follows: “You know, I am so inclined to respond, that everything is possible in Russia, even the constitutional monarchy. But this is an incorrect answer. When talking seriously, no, because we already cannot turn Russia away from the democratic way of development.”¹⁵ Moreover, Putin added that for such a huge and multinational country like Russia the most of the power must be concentrated in the hands of the leader, “at least, at this point of the development of our country.”¹⁶

So at the end of 2002 Putin proclaimed on national television and radio that there simply cannot be a change to any other form of government from the democracy. However, Nikolai Petrakov, the director of the Institute of Problems with Markets, is convinced about the opposite. In his article “Why do reforms not take place in Russia” he boldly says that democracy in Russia is just “funny” because people vote for one line of politics but the government implements a totally different one. Even the Constitution of Russia, in Petrakov’s opinion, is “very monarchical”: the president has a right to fire Duma (the Russian Congress) if it votes on not trusting the government three times.¹⁷

Overall, Petrakov believes that Russian reforms will always go wrong when the government does not follow the rules of the game of the democratic society that the leadership talks about. Sadly, but we may once again make a parallel with the “yes-no” game of politics: it is never what it is said to be. It was necessary and in fashion for Putin to talk about the gaining strength of the democratic society in Russia in 2002-2003 as they were the middle years of his first term. Nowadays, in 2004 after he is already reelected for another four years, the democratic speech does not seem so necessarily urgent. The leader has gathered all of this power and he might as well turn out to be another monarch. In this context, the second part of his answer to Mitrofanov in 2002 makes total sense: it is now clear that the concentration of power in the hands of the president is far more important than the democratic aspirations, at least so it works in the Russian society.

¹⁵ *V. Putin: Razgovor s Rossiei. (V. Putin: The Dialogue with Russia).* The direct line with the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin. Olma-Polizdat: Moscow, 2003, p. 116.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

Furthermore, Viacheslav Kostikov, a correspondent from *Arguments and Facts*, accuses Putin of practicing “home made democracy”¹⁸, meaning that the President tries to adjust to the specifics of the internal economics and politics. Kostikov goes further into describing the way he sees the Russian society as a whole emphasizing the point that it is such a mix of different systems which justifies the Presidential way of doing things:

We do not have a society but rather it is a political hybrid, with a head from the West, a body from the Soviet system, legs (especially in the regions) are deep in feudalism, and a neck is controlled by the President. That is why our people vote not for the party programs but for "the hard working and not drinking Putin."¹⁹

Thus, the Russian population trusts Putin as a leader more than the political system of a State. During the second reelection of Putin around 70 percent of people voted for his candidature. However, more than 70 percent of the population thinks that Duma is a “wasted institution” and the House representatives are sold out.²⁰ It is rather possible that people are confused and tired of this political hybrid that their state is and are waiting for the President to take the right course in developing a more democratic country.

It is then Putin’s challenge to lead Russia into a more stable democracy and not just a “home made” one. So far he was not been able to come to a well “managed democracy of a Western model; what we have is not a managed democracy but a scared power.”²¹ According to Kostikov from *Arguments and Facts*, the Russian liberals despise the undemocratic Putin and compare him to the democratic Yeltsin because they want to put pressure to the power and to weaken the Presidential power so they can be easily managed.²² As we will see in the next sections, Putin is not a weak leader and he stands up to the challenge. Putin is first of all the “people’s President”²³ or he would not have become the President at all.

Finally, the main issue that the President Putin is attempting to resolve during his presidency is a step toward a better future for his people, that Russia become “richer and freer, that people were not afraid for their property, that hundreds of thousands of manufacturers compete between themselves and not just a dozen of oil barons, and that people were not afraid

¹⁷ Petrakov, N. “Pochemy v Rossii ne idyt reformi?” (“Why do reforms not take place in Russia?”) *Arguments and Facts* June, 2004, N. 25 (1234), p. 6.

¹⁸ The exact word is “prikladnoi” in Russian which would mean home made or craft work. In “Kakaia demokratia nyjna Rossii?” (“What type of democracy does Russia need?”) *Arguments and Facts* N. 34, 2004.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Kostikov, V. “Pochemy liberali tak ne lubiat Putina?” (“Why do the liberals not like Putin so much?”) In *Arguments and Facts*. N. 28 (1237), July 2004, p. 4.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Kostikov, V. “Sni v letnuu noch”. (“Dreams in a summer night”). In *Arguments and Facts*. N. 31 (1240), August 2004, p. 4.

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to serve in the Army...”²⁴ In short, that is what people are going to remember about Putin’s Russia; numbers and statistical evidence is going to be left for the books. In the real life people are going to remember Putin if they began to live better and safer, or if their lives “became easier”.²⁵

CHAPTER 2

The Cultural Mentality and the Relations with the Church

2.1 - Symbolism under Putin’s Leadership

There are numerous symbolic attributes of Putin’s choosing (directly or indirectly) that tell a story about what the President wanted to represent before the nation and which direction he wanted it to follow. However, the mix is really confusing: it combines vestiges of tsarism, Soviet times, communist and non-communist years. It is like the President is undecided which side he is on and by keeping sometimes contradicting elements he wants to keep all of the population “happy”. Furthermore, it is like the destiny of Russia itself, not being able to choose between westernization and its own “special path”.

The first symbol that can be associated with the president is Medved, or a bear, which stood for the Unity, the pro-Kremlin party organized in 1999 while Putin was a prime-minister. It is not a coincidence that the bear was selected: it should represent the mighty power/authority that the Kremlin has always maintained over the rest of the population. The second significant event that strongly reflected the symbolic influence was the day when Yeltsin resigned, on December 31, 1999. Putin met with Patriarch Alexii, as if to get the formal approval of the Russian Orthodox Church (meaning the state had a strong support of the church when needed). Then the ceremony of handing Putin a nuclear briefcase from the previous leader took place. The briefcase symbolizes the nuclear power Russia has over the world and the ceremony itself points out to the fact that all of this power is given to one man, the new president. The agreement with the church and the nuclear might combined presented the new figure of the state leader as all-powerful, the only one who held the future of the country in his hands.

Later, during the high time of his first presidency, Putin ordered that Russia had a new set of emblems: a coat of arms as a double headed eagle, bringing the memories of the tsarist Russia, a Soviet anthem from Stalin times, and a tricolor flag as a non-communist element. This hardly uniform mix is alarming, for to be proud of a country’s past is one thing, but when this country has yet many opponents of that old regime, it becomes a tricky business.

Moreover, the symbolism becomes even more interesting when one discovers what this specific choice of colors on the flag stands for: white is the color of freedom and state

²⁴ Kostikov, V. “Sni v letnuu noch”. (“Dreams in a summer night”). In *Arguments and Facts*. N. 31 (1240), August 2004, p. 4.

independence; blue corresponds to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, that is believed to protect Russia; and red is associated with a state power.²⁶ There is even the Flag Day (August 22 of each year) to raise consciousness and respect for the State symbols in young generations of Russia (though this holiday was not established by Putin's government but earlier, in 1994). However, not many Russians themselves know or remember about this day partly because it is not so much promoted or emphasized by the current government. For instance, this year some Russian cities such as Perm, Kostroma, and Tver organized public festivities on the Flag Day, but an almost two million people city Omsk did not have any.²⁷



²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ In the original source it is *derjavnost* which means a state power in Russian. Dryjinina, M. "Zabitii simvol". ("Forgotten symbol"). In *Arguments and Facts*. August, 2004, N. 34 (1243).

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ The picture was taken by the author of this Project in Omsk, Russia, August, 2004.

Nevertheless, the most peculiar and alarming election of symbolic objects accepted during Putin's already second presidency was the choice for the Russian Olympic uniforms for the team competing in Athens in 2004. As *The St. Petersburg Times* confirms, "the uniform, ordered by the Russian Olympic Committee and produced by the Russian company Bosco Di Ciliegi, in partnership with the Italian fashion house ETRO S.P.A., is a modern remake of the uniform worn by Soviet athletes in the 1930s."²⁹ It was promoted on the national state owned television Channel One as "a nostalgia for the 1930s."³⁰ Yevgenia Albats of *The St. Petersburg Times* rightly asks what this nostalgia should stand for:

For the time when millions of peasants who resisted collectivization were sent to Siberia?
For the largely artificial, Stalin-orchestrated famine in Ukraine and Kazakhstan that left some five million people dead? Or maybe nostalgia for the Great Terror, which resulted in many more millions of Soviet citizens being killed or dispatched to the gulag?³¹

The official reply by Bosco Di Ciliegi Company was that the uniform was designed to remind people of "the cult of the sporting spirit and body of that time"³², meaning 1930s. However, this choice is definitely not the best one since this time period can easily bring back the memories of the Stalinist regime for many people.³³ For Putin's image of today, it is also a negative consequence: it becomes not so difficult to draw a parallel between his presidency in the Kremlin and the Stalin era from the outside world, as Albats rightly makes her conclusions in the article.

Regarding the symbolism, it has always been one of the key elements in the Russian (and Soviet) politics. The President Putin can use it to his advantage in terms of promoting his party before the elections (more personal reasons) or advocating for the Russian patriotism and national unity (State interests). Colors, animal figures, songs, and other emblems can be of a significant influence in the minds of the population. In short, the usage of symbolism can do the President a lot of good. However, it has to be chosen very carefully and emphasized on a regular basis later on; otherwise, their effect can easily turn into negative outcomes damaging (sometimes severely) the image of the President and his team (such as the case with the Olympic uniforms).

²⁹ Albats, Y. "The winning "spirit" of the 1930s?" *The St. Petersburg Times*. August 17, 2004, p. 4.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ For more on Stalin government see Montefiore, S. *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* and Ulam, A. *Stalin: The Man and His Era*.

CHAPTER 3

The Relationship between the Power, Media, and Business

“An oligarch is a person with stolen money that keeps stealing from the national resources using his special entrance into the organizations of power and management.” Putin during the press conference in the Kremlin.³⁴

Another good measurement of the democratic development in a country is the relationship between the power from the top of the government, media, and business. The personal freedom, the freedom of press and expression are the foundation for any modern democratic society. The businesses are also at advantage in a democracy for the government does not control their legitimate existence. In Russia, however, those issues become painful subjects to admit as there are some press and business manipulations from Putin’s team.³⁵

Associating Yeltsin’s government with anti-communism, the first president of the Russian Federation gave the population the freedom of speech and expression; Putin, however, did not allow for this luxury. One of the most criticized Putin’s deeds is his relationship with the independent press and television channels. His treating of independent journalists, such as Babitsky, and owners of the television stations, such as Berezovsky and Gusinsky, brought a “syndrome of totalitarianism in a pluralistic society”:

Not once since the start of perestroika have the authorities permitted themselves such blatant lawlessness and cynicism toward representatives of the mass media. If the journalist Babitsky has committed an illegal act from the point of view of the authorities, then the question of his guilt or innocence must be decided in an open judicial trial. If the actions against Babitsky are a reaction to the contents of his reports from Chechnya, then this is a direct violation of the principle of freedom of the press guaranteed by the Constitution.³⁶

Gradually, the President Putin showed his true identity: the omnipotent ruler that did not tolerate opposition. His ways to deal with it were the Soviet style repression and hiding of truth. In 2002 Putin does no longer hide his pretensions when he says: “Yeltsin is a free individual who can move about, meet with anyone, and express his opinion. We respect his opinion. However, I have my own opinion, and I will do what I think is best for Russia now and in the future.”³⁷

³⁴ ITAR-TASS, 20.06.2003, in *Putinki: Kratkii Sbornik Izrechenii Prezidenta (Pervii Srok)*. (*Putinki: A Brief Collection of the Quotations from the President (The First Term)*). EcoBook: Moscow, 2004, p. 97.

³⁵ For more on democratic development theory see O’Donnell, “Teoría democrática y política comparada”. (“Democratic theory and comparative politics”). *Desarrollo Económico-Revista de Ciencias Sociales*. IDES, Buenos Aires, vol. 39, N. 156, January-March 2000.

³⁶ *Obshchaya gazeta*, February 9, 2000, in Shevtsova, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

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These words also meant Putin felt the full force of his power and did not need any more “advisers and guides.”³⁸

The conflict between Putin and big business counts such names as Berezovski, who is now in exile in Great Britain, Gusinsky, who hides out in Spain, and lately Khodorkovsky, the past head of YUKOS, the leading company in the petroleum business in Russia who is now in prison awaiting his trial.³⁹ The first two names belonged to the television business and their prosecution directly hurts the democratic establishment in the country. A public announcement on this issue was made during RCPP⁴⁰ (Russian Union of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs) on June 15, 2000:

Today his name (about Gusinsky) is a synonym of the critical relation toward power and a symbol of the independent media that is in opposition... The fragility of Russian democracy became very obvious yesterday. Now there is a precedent that looks like the governmental persecution of the political opposition.⁴¹

These facts about Putin’s relations with the independent media and big businesses made one member of the Russian Duma, Sergei Kovalev, to say that “we live in a country where KGB came to power. He acts as he was taught to act. He makes quiet steps toward the police control; the police state is being constructed.”⁴²

In his defense, Putin himself called the oligarchs such as Gusinsky simply thieves who thrive of public resources. This is what Putin thought of Gusinsky when the president gave an interview to the newspaper *Corriera de la Sera* in 2001: “He (Gusinsky) hid in his pockets over a milliard of dollars and does not want to give it up. Instead, he tries to use the controlled media as an instrument of the blackmail of the state.”⁴³

At the same time Putin’s public reasons for those arrests and persecutions are the investigations for fraud and the illegitimate ownership of the companies which goes back to the Soviet times. The public opinion demonstrates that the conflict began when those oligarchs wanted to get involved into politics. For instance, Putin thought necessary to announce during his second election campaign that no big business owner could be allowed to enter politics: “We have to make sure that nobody could “suck” from the power and could not use it in his interests.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ For more on the Russian oligarchs see Hoffman, D. *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in New Russia*.

⁴⁰ Rossiiskii Sovet Promishlennikov i Predprinimatelei (in Russian).

⁴¹ *Chetire Goda s Putinim. (Four Years with Putin)*. Vremia: Moscow, 2004, p. 124.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 685.

⁴³ ITAR-TASS, 16.07.2001, in *Putinki: Kratkii Sbornik Izrechenii Prezidenta (Pervii Srok)*. (*Putinki: A Brief Collection of the Quotations of the President (The First Term)*). EcoBook: Moscow, 2004, p. 153.

No clan, not even one oligarch can be close to the regional and federal power—they have to be on the equal distance from the power.”⁴⁴

The latest case with Khodorkovsky demonstrates how an oligarch in Russia should never become political. It is a well-known public opinion that Khodorkovsky tried purposively to gain power in political circles knowing that this step would not be forgiven by the leader.⁴⁵ So it happened: his company was caught in the illegitimate use of funds scandal and Khodorkovsky himself (together with his main partner Lebedev) was brought to jail.

On the other side, perhaps this kind of control and sometimes repressions from the government were necessary during the first term of Vladimir Putin since he inherited from Yeltsin’s years disorder and chaos in almost every sphere of life, be it politics or economics. It might as well have been essential to demonstrate the presidential power over very powerful magnates in order to maintain control of the country and make people respect, even fear, the government, a feeling that was lost during the Yeltsin’s era of drinking and elderly sicknesses.

In our opinion, it was the shortest way for Putin to gather his strength and authority as a leader. In his benefit, there is a fact that the prosecuted him media business had a monopolized structure: “If it (the freedom of speech) is monopolized by two or three money bags, it is not the freedom of speech, but the defense of the corporate interests.”⁴⁶ That is why Putin could argue that “the information about the end of the free press in his country is too overrated.”⁴⁷

To his second advantage, there is Putin’s belief in the strong state and order though he associates the state directly with the power of one person and the methods to establish order are usually the forceful, sometimes violent ones. This is what Putin says on this topic during his interview with the newspaper *Figaro*:

I would not say that there are two ever fighting enemies—the state on the one side and the oligarch on the other side. Better, I think, that the state holds in its hands the stick with which it hits only once. But on the head. We have only just taken this stick in our hands, but this was enough to get the attention. We will seriously get mad, then we will use the stick with no doubt. One cannot blackmail the state. If it is necessary, we will destroy the instruments of this blackmail.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *The Independent Paper*, 28.02.2000 in *Putinki: Kratkii Sbornik Izrechenii Prezidenta (Pervii Srok)*. (*Putinki: A Brief Collection of the Quotations of the President (The First Term)*). EcoBook: Moscow, 2004, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Denisov, A. in *Chetire Goda s Putinim. (Four Years with Putin)*. Vremia: Moscow, 2004, p. 120. (in Russian slang they use the word “narivalsia”, which is approximately “was purposively too bold”)

⁴⁶ Putin’s presentation during the meeting in the Columbia University of New York, ITAR-TASS, 26.09.2003, in *Putinki: Kratkii Sbornik Izrechenii Prezidenta (Pervii Srok)*. (*Putinki: A Brief Collection of the Quotations of the President (The First Term)*). EcoBook: Moscow, 2004, p. 139.

⁴⁷ ITAR-TASS, 13.01.2001, in *Putinki: Kratkii Sbornik Izrechenii Prezidenta (Pervii Srok)*. (*Putinki: A Brief Collection of the Quotations of the President (The First Term)*). EcoBook: Moscow, 2004, p. 143.

⁴⁸ *Izvestia*, 27.10.2000, in *Putinki: Kratkii Sbornik Izrechenii Prezidenta (Pervii Srok)*. (*Putinki: A Brief Collection of the Quotations of the President (The First Term)*). EcoBook: Moscow, 2004, p. 155.

However, it is critical to point out that, firstly, those are still non-democratic ways of handling the problems of society, and secondly, even if those actions can be “justified” in the name of stability during the first presidency, the fact that they are still going on after Putin has well established himself as the highest leader, tells us about the unwillingness of his government to follow the steps of democracy in practice.

When Rene Andre, the member of a lower house of the French parliament and the head of the group France—Russia, was interviewed by the Russian newspaper *News Time (Vremia Novostei)*, he agreed with the version that Putin simply had to take this harsh course of action because of the previous situation in Russia. “Putin showed every one his place. I like the fact that the president turned the oligarchs away from the power. Businessmen, even the very successful ones, have to have their place in business and not in big politics,”-thinks Andre.⁴⁹

Andre also cited the examples of Charles de Gaulle, the leader of the Fifth Republic, who “immediately took control over television and made it his instrument of exerting pressure on the minds of the people.”⁵⁰ As a very brief French history review, the television in France was under the governmental control from 1958 till 1981, and only since then the situation gradually became different as the socialists came to power. Thus, as Andre strongly believes, the current situation in Russia is:

an unavoidable passage, necessary to order the minds. Let us not hurry up the events. They happen in your country so fast anyways. In almost 13 years, since 1991, Russia went through so many changes that other countries go through in hundreds of years... Vladimir Putin has definitely a European mind. In this face, I am sure, we will see him in the next four years.⁵¹

CHAPTER 4

Where Does Putin’s Second Term Lead the Country ?

Putin showed himself as a very careful and intelligent politician who often prefers not to take sides on public. The result is that almost always in Russian politics the rules of the game are not clear. The large part of this error is the presidential leadership which is not strong enough or simply not willing to take a side and decide once and for all. This ending of the phrase, the part of “once and for all” is very important: in Russia no order or even law works equally for everyone and, in addition, “implemented once part” becomes thousands of corrections and new reforms soon after the initial start. The mentality is such that an individual resists the strict obedience of the law, thinking that he or she may somehow go around it.

⁴⁹ *Chetire Goda s Putinim. (Four Years with Putin)*. Vremia: Moscow, 2004, p. 40.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p.141.

Well, as we saw, the system allows for it. Of course, we may not blame the president for all of those grave defects, but at the same time, we believe, he stands behind this structure of the state. In our opinion, he should set the tone, the direction to follow through the initiated reforms. The president Putin has definitely a strong hand in things he decided upon and especially in keeping his authority in power. However, his weakness is that he wishes to bring neutrality in public when later on he is bound to decide one way or another. He is very strong as an individual character but he allows weaknesses and creaks in the system. One may only suppose that it could be intentional.

One thing is clear so far (in the middle of 2004)-Putin has been preparing himself for the presidency during the first four years; now when he is reelected for another term, he may drop any formalities and, therefore, we have yet to see his real face and the direction he will set for the Russian Federation. Our opinion is supported in some way by the words of Yuriy Skyratov, the attorney general (generalnii prokyror) of Russia from 1995 till 1999: "...Nowadays the question remains which input (sled) Putin will leave in the history of Russia. He has to show himself as a personality. We have not felt this yet."⁵²

Conclusions

C.1 - The Political Ranking and Future Stability of Russia

"Yesterday Russia has been taken from the list of the countries with the high political stability,"-says the Russian newspaper *Izvestia (News)*.⁵³ Most political analysts, both national and foreign ones, attribute this loss to the YUKOS scandal and some social welfare reforms initiated by Putin this summer (European summer of 2004). "Despite the strong position of the Russian President Putin, the political stability index (of Russia) fell to the number 57 from 60, which was achieved in July of the last year,"-confirms Loren Ruzecas from the company *Eurasia* that together with the Deutch Bank calculates this information.⁵⁴ As of today Russia is placed in the group of "moderate countries", together with Turkey and China (number 59), Argentina (number 54), and Philippines (number 57).

Because of Putin's anti-oligarchs campaign and especially the latest case of YUKOS, many analysts fear that Putin's Russia became lawless or, rather, that the government created its own laws which it obeys.⁵⁵ Those are all old stones into Putin's yard reminding that the Russian leader still prefers a very strong autocratic system of government. The judicial system, which has been analyzed in this Project, remains one of the weakest blocks in the Russian democratic chain. Our supposition is that Putin could not, or rather decided not to, due to the current

⁵² Skyratov, Y. in *Chetire Goda s Putinim. (Four Years with Putin)*. Vremia: Moscow, 2004, p. 216.

⁵³ Tihonov, A. "Rossia teriaet reiting politicheskoi stabilnosti". ("Russia is losing its political stability ranking"). *Izvestia*. July 23, 2004, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

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circumstances, rock the boat too much. He focused his main efforts on the economic stability of Russia, leaving the implementation of the democratic institutions for later (or even for his successor).

However, Putin himself as a leader began to lose “points” in the eyes of the Russian people. Our latest data is from July and August of 2004 when several polls were taken in Russia to calculate the Presidential ranking. The results are as follows:⁵⁶

January 2004: it is Putin’s high time. His popularity is above 70 percent.

May 2004: the numbers are falling to as low as 54 percent.

July 2004: the tendency confirmed; Putin’s ranking is now about just above 50 percent.



What conclusions can we make from these numbers? First of all, people may be getting unsatisfied with Putin’s politics overall; second, that Putin may have done something specific that “upset” the public mind; or third, that it is a natural phenomenon to lose some points over

⁵⁵ Randolph, senior economist from London Investigation Center of World Markets, in *Izvestia*. July 23, 2004, p. 1.

⁵⁶ The poles are FOM (Fund Obshchestvennoe Mnenie), VCIOM, and Levada Center. In *Moskovskii Komsomolec*, 28.07-4.08.2004, pp. 2-3.

time but we have to keep in mind that the majority of the population is still content with his politics.

All three of our hypotheses were supported by Russian political analysts. For instance, Dmitrii Oreshkin, the leader of the group *Mercator*, thinks that the numbers reveal “the phenomenon of three years”, meaning people gradually become unsatisfied with their government over the course of three years (it was more than three years for Putin because, according to Oreshkin, he did not “do much during the first presidency”).⁵⁷

Another political analyst Olga Krishtanovskaia says that the main reason for Putin’s falling ranking is that “the power has isolated itself from the people”, but she also agrees with the fact that 50 percent is not so bad after all.⁵⁸ Finally, a political analyst Andranik Migranian believes that the main reason is a specific policy of the latest social welfare reforms undertaken by Putin’s team. Putin initiated a package of social welfare reforms that were designed to give people a specific amount of money instead of their usual actual social benefits (such as free medication, subsidies in housing, etc.). As Migranian points out, “Putin before those reforms was seen as a person that stood over the battle between the parliament and the government, and now he was put in the epicenter.”⁵⁹

Thus, what do Putin’s five years amount to now that he seems to lose his popularity? Do all his talks about the need of furthering the democracy have a solid ground? Fortunately, those five years brought Russia more economic stability and that meant its people began to live better and have hopes for the future of their children. It has also meant that on the political level the population as a whole became to be more aware of the contemporary Russian politics. The fact that people are not content with their government because they desire a more democratic approach is both Putin’s achievement and his negative drawback. It is his achievement because due to his presidential efforts Russian people began to give political aspirations more weight since their economic burden was lessened. At the same time, it is a negative outcome because it shows that Putin was not able to promote democracy to the extent he said he would or to where Russian population would like it to be. Nevertheless, one can argue that overall the years have been a move forward towards a better economy now and a more stable democratic development in the future.

C.2 – Future Challenges to Putin’s Regime

Both Fedorov and Cyladze, the authors of a new book *The Era of Putin*, summarize the major challenges that Putin will undoubtedly face in his presidency (if not already facing) all too

⁵⁷ *Moskovskii Komsomolec*. N. 30 (376), 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

well: first of all, one of the main problems for Putin will be “the instability of his political regime”; secondly, Putin will have to deal with the fact that he isolated himself from the rest on the Russian political arena; and third, Putin will have to face the necessity of a “new political mechanism” to develop the country.⁶⁰ The way the President Putin handles these three challenges will affect the course of democracy for the Russian Federation.

In more detail, the instability of Putin’s political regime is probably the biggest problem because as we have seen in this Project the Russian politics do not have a strong base to fall back onto. Rather, they are based on a personal leadership such as the case with the President Putin. As our analysis shows, Russia needed a determinate leader as Mr. Putin after Yeltsin left chaotically; however, as the time goes and the country stabilizes economically, a political order becomes of a great importance. A stable democratic regime is the only way to make sure that the country does not lunge into an economic disaster once again.

The Russian scenario is difficult to play out due to the same instability we have just mentioned. The analysis previous to September 2004 showed some positive signs of a further democratization of the system. Nevertheless, the Beslan tragedy seemed to set things for a slightly different direction again: though the strategy on terrorism did not change, Putin moved some political questions of power into a more authoritative channel. The biggest difference would be Putin’s decision to directly appoint the governors of all 89 Russian regions without giving candidates a chance to run for the office publicly.⁶¹

All together, Putin continues to isolate himself in the political arena: media is under control, the parliament is dominated by pro-Putin parties, now the governors are his personal appointees. In this situation, it has been suggested that only three roads were available to be taken for the Russian future: one is more authoritarianism, even a dictatorship; two is another crisis leading to another chaos in the country; three is a step forward to a democratization with a more flexible system.⁶²

At present, Putin’s politics remind of “a model from Louis XIV, which is balancing between parties, eliminating politically active oligarchs, concentrating powerful resources in his hands, a victorious war for a consolidation of the elite and country’s population, creating the cult of “the President-Sun”.⁶³ However, all leaders, even the most powerful ones, are bound to fall or to be replaced some day; the goal is that this replacement be as smooth as possible. That is why the President Putin need to promote a new political mechanism, or more democratic institutions, so that he builds a base on which another transition can take place. Though we have not seen

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Fedorov, V.V. and Cyladze, A.M. *Epoha Putina. (The Era of Putin)*. Eksmo: Moscow, 2003, pp. 438-441.

⁶¹ Bush, J. and Rossant, J. “Next, the economy?” In *Business Week*. September 27, 2004, p. 62.

⁶² Fedorov and Cyladze. Op. Cit., p. 439.

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this process to start, we believe the President Putin is fully aware of this challenge as a primary one for the Russian reality of today and he has enough time till the year 2008 to get it on its way.

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⁶³ Ibidem, p. 357.

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