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On the Elitological Theory of a Transit Society in Modern Russia

ABSTRACT

These theses represent some thoughts and ideas cast by the analytical review of doctor's and master's theses on the elitological subjects of the recent two decades. As of now, elitology has not been well developed in Russia. Perhaps, the only full-fledged elitological school of thought is functioning in the city of Rostov-on-Don. Not all other centres and research groups engaged in this problematics are organised, active or independent enough. Meanwhile, modern Russia is in a desperate need of development of the theoretical basis and accumulation of practical knowledge in elitology. The first reason thereof is the pressing need to create political and administrative elite of a new-type, develop standards and criteria of belonging to an elite group and establish effective mechanisms of control of elite development processes by the society. Under the conditions of a transit society, a closed mechanism of vertically integrated elite development has proved to be ineffective. At the moment, country leaders are attempting to make the elite development process more open. At the same time, the elite of any transit society face permanent opposition from not only the counterelite but also the antielite. Under these conditions, coming of the antielite to power is a serious danger, while existence of the counterelite contributes to democratization and development of a civil society. In the Russian society, all these three forces have had their own configuration from the early 1990s and up to now, which is quite specific as compared with other countries. To have a firm grasp of this field and provide a competent conduct of an elite development policy, Russian authorities need a domestic theoretical elitological foundation based on the recent experience of Russia, concerned about its specificity and developed with account of national interests, first of all.

Key words: *elitology, elite development, counterelite, antielite, transit society, elite recruitment.*

Elitology has been gradually developing in modern Russia in both quantitative and qualitative terms. This conclusion has been reliably supported by review of the theses published on occasion of the Congress.

The politological centers of our country that pay particular attention to elitological subjects include the Rostov school of elitologists led by the Honoured Worker of Science of the Russian Federation and all republics of the North Caucasus, Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor Ponedelkov A. V.

Having turned to elite studies more than twenty years ago, defended a Doctor's Degree thesis and published a lot of papers over these years, A. V. Ponedelkov did one more very important job for domestic elitology, viz. created a school of Rostov elitologists thoroughly engaged in studying of various aspects of this vast subject, including the problems peculiar to the North Caucasian Region, which is extremely important and complex not only in ethnic, but also political, social and economic terms.

Functioning of this school (which our calculations show to have already included more than thirty scientists, most of them being young Candidates of Science) is especially important due to its thorough engagement in field research. I already wrote about that, as well as underscored its importance for science. It is this research, competent and covering sometimes up to 15-20 regions of Russia, that shows what actually happens with elites, how they change and how their values, interests, priorities and composition become transformed.

According to our research and observation, the elitological school of Rostov-on-Don is the leader of elitology in modern Russia. There are also some other researchers and centres that are purposefully, professionally and thoroughly engaged in studies of elites. A good example is Olga Kryshtanovskaia centre.

However, we have to say once more that there are no schools in a true sense of this word, i.e. groups of scientists having leaders, followers, concepts, clear-cut niches, research, attained and published results.

I cannot but admit that there are some in their first stages that had no time to develop yet, but they are certainly very few. What our huge country needs is at least a few genuine schools.

Their importance, especially for the political practice of our country, which has been in a transit state for many years, cannot be overestimated. By the way, we think one of the main reasons of our long-lasting transit to be inadequacy of quality and condition of our political and administrative elite to the challenges of transformation of Russia. But whence such an elite can come from if it has never been systematically or conceptually trained, while various lifts, which continually fail and stop, cannot cope with the challenge of training of a new administrative elite, either. Moreover, nobody has got a clear idea of what ideological or political qualities the elite should have to be able to understand where the country should go or how to change etc.

The job is really very difficult. After all, there has still been no other country in the world, especially a country of such diverse history and destiny as Russia that made transition from socialism to capitalism or, perhaps, another political system unknown yet. Therefore, nobody can know for sure what kind of elite is necessary or how it should develop. Nevertheless, it is clear that it should be an elite of a new type or, perhaps, generation, viz. ideologically unblinkered, but with firm patriotic views, good creative qualities, always open to the new and the external world, able to identify everything useful among new phenomena, both domestic and foreign, evaluate them and creatively apply in the native land.

With this aim in view, the elite should be fundamentally and widely educated and carefully selected in terms of status crystallization in a course of democratic competitions etc.

Our political science, viz. elitology and first of all such schools of elitologists as that of Rostov, could and should render essential theoretical and practical assistance in this case. Hopefully, such time will come. To complete this thesis, let me formulate a conclusion and a few questions connected with it. The conclusion is that Russia needs political and administrative elite of a new type. What qualities should it have? Who should train it? What is the way to develop it? What role should political science and elitology in particular have in this case? I have already answered some of these questions

above. Below, we will do our best to answer the one left unanswered.

The matter is who should train the new elite.

The current state of affairs is known to be spontaneous if not chaotic, which was caused by destruction of the former Soviet system of training and retraining of personnel for the top administrative echelon. I have already written a few articles about that system, its functioning, advantages and disadvantages². The capital point here is who and how should train a new elite. As far as we know, nobody has given any satisfactory answer yet. Before articulating our ideas about that, let me note that world elitology has not studied the problem of training and replacement of elites in different political systems either fundamentally or even at least as a first approximation. Even less so as far as different civilizations are concerned, though each of them seems to have the elite development features of its own. I mean the theoretical aspect first of all, though it is certainly important in practical terms, too. If we take into account that the political system features are aggravated with those of the particular civilization, as well as national peculiar features connected with historical experience, then it becomes clear how difficult it is to study this problem. One should also remember about the transit condition of the political systems, which affects both the course and the contents of the elite development process. After all, it is clear that every political system has elite development regularities and mechanisms of its own. In particular, parliamentary republics are led by political parties dominating in the country. The parties have well-tested elite-recruitment mechanisms beginning from identification of most prospective candidates to this thin layer and their multiple proficiency checks and finishing with their vertical and horizontal promotion. Parties are elite-training centers in any political system. However, political systems differ in elite-development mechanisms and principles.

In totalitarian systems, these mechanisms are almost totally closed from public influence and control over the very process of elite development and activity. Vertically developed and integrated, these elites have both advantages (e. g. high consolidation) and disadvantages (e. g. low creativity), which weakens their competitiveness. Authoritative systems combine mechanisms, principles and standards of totalitarian and democratic systems, and elite development alters in openness and closeness for public influence, depending on the situation.

The Russian situation of the 2000s brightly confirms the conclusion made. Having received evidence that the closed mechanism of vertically integrated elite development has serious drawbacks in the specific domestic transit situation, the top management of the country (and the authority tandem, first of all) decided to make it more open. Re-establishment of elections of governors and mayors, staffing of the Federation Council actually through an election system in regions along with elections of governors makes the process of Russian elite origination more democratic and open despite the established filters, e. g. a requirement to be supported by municipal deputies. In due course, this circumstance might make our political elite not only more competitive, but also closer to the society, its interests and needs.

In the countries with developed democracy, a mature civil society and free mass media, elite development and functioning takes place with direct participation of these institutes and their vigilant control. That is the way for the country to provide itself with an adequate, high-skilled and competitive elite.

With all drawbacks inherent in democratic institutes (e. g. bulkiness, complex mechanisms and procedures, high costs, time-consuming decision making), their elite development and productivity of elite activity is much higher than in totalitarian and authoritative countries mostly due to their quality, professionalism, functionality and adequacy to the problems to be solved.

Nevertheless, that is the issue for our political researchers, and first of all elitologists, to study in real earnest.

Now we would like to articulate some ideas about elite development and origination of a new elite in the current Russian situation.

In the above-mentioned articles, we already wrote that when one ideological, internal political, economic or external political etc. system is under transit to another one under the conditions that the vector of development is indefinite and many patterns typical for the stage of wild capitalism are in force, then all aspects of elite develop not in a civilized way, i.e. according to established laws, as it takes place in the countries with developed democracy, but according to the will of contradictory forces aimed at domination. We also mean those forces that do not announce their objectives in an open way. E.g. in the 1990s, it was with oligarchs, semilegal business owners and criminal elements that the final word in development of different branches of authorities at different levels and, respectively, the political and administrative elite, rested. Here we cannot but doubt if such people can be regarded as the genuine elite, which is defined as the best part of the society that is unconditionally patriotic, honest and aimed at public benefit and profit of the home state. In the 1990s and even in the following years, a considerable part of the Russian elite was far from these qualities, which precludes from its treatment as the elite. That was and still is the way for many analysts to think even now.

However, there are a lot of specialists who thought and still think that those people are the elite because the country cannot exist or function without them, which also follows from the definition. As far as the elite quality and its compliance with generally accepted research practice are concerned, it depends on the nature of the elite the society is able to originate. Proverbially, a mad parish, i. e. country / society, must have a mad priest, i. e. government / elite.

However, we have to make a material reservation here: when elite development mechanisms are closed, the society cannot actually influence this process. Therefore, it is the top layer of the political and administrative elite that accounts for establishment of principles, rules and standards of elite development, as well as creates and regulates its mechanisms.

Another extremely important circumstance connected with this subject is that transit societies always experience a conflict of three instead of two types of elite, viz. the elite itself, the counterelite and the antielite. In this case, the first two are basically patriotic but see development of the country in a different way, while the third one is antipatriotic or apatriotic at the most. It is just that situation that Russia has had for rather a long time, viz. almost all over the recent two decades. The countries with a mature political system always experience counteraction of two elites, viz. the ruling elite and the counterelite. However, they struggle for creation rather than destruction.

Having seized the core commanding heights of the economy in the early 1990s, these forces almost completely subordinated the power sphere to themselves. As a result, some sources run that nearly one-third deputies of the State Duma were people with criminal past. The situation at other power levels and branches is not believed to be better. The former party-and-state functionaries reigned, but did not rule. It is also worth remembering that at that time; foreign, viz. American, advisers were omnipotent in all spheres and actually dictated how to build new Russian democracy.

Another point to be made here is that the political elite of any country and time is always heterogeneous, but the level of its consolidation and dissidence considerably varies among particular systems. There are several reasons for it to be highest in a totalitarian system.

First come principles and standards of selection of the elite, especially its top echelon. Staffed by the principle of ideological and organizational loyalty to the leader and the single coherent team, the elite permanently reveals ideological dissidents and potential renegades and gets rid of them, quite often assaulting him with violence. Therefore, this elite is cemented not only with loyalty, which is often fanatical, but also with fear of punishment for dissidence or contrariness. Fear is the second, and very strong, quality holding the totalitarian elite together. The third quality is a missionary ambition

to remain in the history of the nation, the country and even the world as heroes or outstanding persons.

This elite has great and important advantages over others. The highest ideological unity and organizational consolidation concentrate its commanding will to the extent that enables making fast and clear decisions perceived by the society as the only right and unconditional for execution. Therefore, some challenges of economic and social development are overcome in a period quite short in historical terms. Another reason is that the maximum concentration of the commanding will causes total concentration of various material and human resources on strategic axis of development.

The result is a blast effect convincing the society of rightness of what is happening in the country, beginning from determination of the course of development, employed methods of solution, arising problems, including rigid and cruel ones, spent material and human resources, and finishing with the sacrifice offered up and perceived by the majority of the society as natural and inevitable. Under such circumstances, witch-hunt, bringing out and prosecution of enemies of the state and the working people, their isolation from the society in prisons and even liquidation (death to spies) is justified and supported by a considerable part of the society if not the majority thereof.

However, it is not only successes that the maximum concentration of material and human resources brings to the society, but also inevitable overstrain, depletion and total disappointment.

They naturally lead first to decrease in rates of development and subsequent stagnation. In the situation of world competition of socio-political and economic systems, the totalitarian system begins glitching and eventually loses the competition. That makes the ruling elite, viz. political and administrative leaders, identify the reasons of the current situation and the internal and external reserves to rectify it.

In the deteriorating situation, the reserves are increasingly more insufficient, especially the internal ones. The elite have to resort to external ones, which are often given on the conditions unfavourable for the recipient. As a result, the fold of danger of the systemic crisis densely nets round the country.

Being blindfolded with ideological and political values of the totalitarian system, afraid to refuse from them once and for all in favour of a different, more effective system, the elite starts rushing about, breaking up into groups, inevitably makes different mistakes and miscalculations, which aggravates the situation even more. Willy-nilly, the elite have to refuse from habitual dogmas first in a latent and then open way, violate the established rules and standards of life and introduce new ones. The latter are borrowed from the systems demonstrating best results, which seems quite logical. The former system collapses, which inevitably discredits the ruling elite, aggravates internal antagonisms, causes an open struggle among the groups and results in replacement of the elite, which is quite often done by revolution frequently accompanied with a civil war.

But what kind of elite comes to replace the former one? That is the mother of all questions. If the former system enwombs different, alternative forces and, consequently, the people leading them, and the leaders have accumulated a diverse potential to pretend for power, then the system crisis peak enables these forces and leaders not only to wish, but also to be able to take the power in their hand and head the nation and the country. In absence of such forces or alternative elites, viz. counterelites or antielites, the ruling elite is replaced with a mixed or combined one consisting partially of bawlers and adventurers, who have felt that the time has come for them to profit, and partially of semilegal business owners and criminals. In general, the situation of internal turmoil, viz. a Great Distemper, paves way to power for the antielite, who, at least many of whom, treat patriotism and national interests as abusive words. Having increasingly scanty internal resources and forcedly resorting to external ones, the elite quickly become dependent on them and start dancing to their pipe.

Certainly, that comes to no good. The crisis is aggravated, and replacement of the elite becomes inevitable. However, having tasted the sweets and delights of power and being benetted with dependence, the antielite does its best to stay in power.

In this situation, different elite groups or clans begin a latent or open struggle for life. The country finds itself in the most dangerous situation when the antielite that have come to power do not know where to direct the country, how to transform it to the necessary effect and what the efficient way to manage it is.

A radically different situation takes place when the country has a legal and legitimate counterelite. Functioning within the existing system, untargeted at revolution or replacement of the current system with another one, the elite needs coming to power to correct the internal and external policy and the national vector of development, overcome the crisis, stabilize the current systems and move further on.

For this reason, the counterelite are similar to the systemic opposition and extremely valuable and useful for any country. That situation is only possible in a country with mature democracy, a well-developed civil society and high political culture of the population.

The reader can rate the theoretical statements and ideas formulated above as mere abstractions. However, the events taking place in the USSR in the late 1980s, i. e. the time of perestroika, and those happening in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s reify these abstractions and make them convincing and realistic. The reasonableness of the above-said has been proved by all contemporary history books, to say nothing of special research of elites. Making our conclusions, we visualized the events of the recent 25 years.

To sum it up, we would like to draw the reader's attention to the idea that the ruling elite of any transit period in any country is always compound. It was and still is especially compound in present Russia.

The former elite of party-and-state functionaries mixed up with the counterelite and the antielite adapts itself to the new circumstances, looks up to various values and stays in a permanent state of shake-up and reorganization. The situation will stay until Russia finds its new dominating ideological and political values or actually a new state ideology builds a new political system and develops a new way of recruitment and training of elites.

The considerations given above are theoretical and maybe even a little abstract. Caused by the subject of the thesis review, they only aim to draw Russian political scientists' attention to the theory in general and the elitological theory of a transit period in particular, as well as the problems connected with development of an elite of a new generation in our country.

We repeatedly say in our articles, public reports at scientific conferences and round tables that domestic political science pays too little attention to development of our own theoretical basis hoping that the theoretical basis of any science is universal and global. We repeated prove that it is not the case with social sciences or humanities though it is with natural and exact sciences, where that approach is really true. Abstaining from another discussion of that subject, I would only like to note that creation and development of our own theoretical basis of Russian political science, meant to consider specificity of our society, state and historical experience, should not go separately from, or even in ignorance of, theoretical developments in political science made in other countries, whether Western or Eastern, because different societies and civilizations still have some features in common.

That is connected with difficulties of combination and coordination of the national component with international one, determination of the role of this or that part when solving particular problems of theory and practice.