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Mariia Ovcharenko

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Abstract

Putinism is a term used to describe the political and socioeconomic system that has emerged under the leadership of Vladimir Putin in Russia. This abstract provides an overview and analysis of key features and dynamics of Putinism, shedding light on its origins, characteristics, and implications. The origins of Putinism can be traced back to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent political and economic turmoil in Russia. As a response to these challenges, Putin rose to power in the early 2000s, presenting himself as a strong leader capable of restoring stability and asserting Russia's influence on the global stage. Putinism embodies a mix of authoritarianism, state control, and populist rhetoric, which has allowed Putin to consolidate power and maintain a tight grip on the political system. At its core, Putinism revolves around a centralized and top-down governance structure, where power is concentrated in the hands of a few key individuals and institutions loyal to Putin. This system is characterized by limited political pluralism, restricted civil liberties, and curtailed media freedom. The state apparatus, including security agencies and state-controlled corporations, plays a significant role in maintaining control and suppressing dissent. Economically, Putinism has witnessed a complex relationship between the state and the market. While the regime has promoted some elements of a market economy, it has also maintained a significant degree of state intervention and control over key industries. State-owned enterprises and close associates of Putin have often enjoyed privileged positions, leading to a concentration of economic power and wealth. This intertwining of political and economic interests has resulted in a system characterized by crony capitalism and corruption.

Under Putinism, nationalism and the projection of Russian power have been central themes. The regime has fostered a narrative of restoring Russia's status as a great power, challenging Western dominance, and asserting its interests in regions like Eastern Europe and the Middle East. This aggressive foreign policy stance has resulted in tensions with the West and contributed to the erosion of trust and cooperation on the international stage.

The impact of Putinism on Russian society has been multifaceted. While it has brought stability and economic growth in some areas, it has also led to the suppression of political opposition, limited civil society activism, and the curtailment of individual freedoms. The lack of genuine political competition and the absence of a level playing field have hindered the development of a vibrant democratic culture in Russia.

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Abstract

Putinismus ist ein Begriff, der verwendet wird, um das politische und sozioökonomische System zu beschreiben, das unter der Führung von Wladimir Putin in Russland entstanden ist. Diese Zusammenfassung bietet einen Überblick und eine Analyse der wichtigsten Merkmale und Dynamiken des Putinismus und wirft Licht auf dessen Ursprünge, Eigenschaften und Auswirkungen. Die Ursprünge des Putinismus lassen sich auf den Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion und die anschließenden politischen und wirtschaftlichen Turbulenzen in Russland zurückführen. Als Reaktion auf diese Herausforderungen gelangte Putin in den frühen 2000er Jahren an die Macht und präsentierte sich als starker Führer, der in der Lage ist, Stabilität wiederherzustellen und den Einfluss Russlands auf der globalen Bühne geltend zu machen. Putinismus verkörpert eine Mischung aus Autoritarismus, staatlicher Kontrolle und populistischer Rhetorik, was es Putin ermöglicht hat, seine Macht zu festigen und einen festen Griff auf das politische System zu behalten. Unter Putinismus spielen Nationalismus und die Projektion russischer Macht eine zentrale Rolle. Das Regime hat eine Erzählung gefördert, die darauf abzielt, Russlands Status als Großmacht wiederherzustellen, die westliche Dominanz herauszufordern und seine Interessen in Regionen wie Osteuropa und dem Nahen Osten zu behaupten. Diese aggressive Außenpolitik hat zu Spannungen mit dem Westen geführt und zum Vertrauensverlust und der Beeinträchtigung der Zusammenarbeit auf internationaler Ebene beigetragen. Die Auswirkungen des Putinismus auf die russische Gesellschaft waren vielschichtig. Während er in einigen Bereichen Stabilität und wirtschaftliches Wachstum gebracht hat, führte er auch zur Unterdrückung der politischen Opposition, zur Einschränkung der zivilgesellschaftlichen Aktivitäten und zur Beschränkung individueller Freiheiten. Das Fehlen echter politischer Konkurrenz und das Fehlen eines fairen Wettbewerbs haben die Entwicklung einer lebendigen demokratischen Kultur in Russland behindert.

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1. Introduction

Topic: Putinism as the ideology and political regime in the Russian Federation.

Research question: Is Putinism rooted into the political, social and economic regime, so it became the main ideology of the Russian Federation?

Today, the system of ensuring peace and security in the world, which developed after the Second World War, is in a state that can be called a crisis. The main reason for this situation is the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, which systematically provokes the escalation of various conflicts, trying in this way to show its influence and importance in the international political arena. It seems that the source of such aggression of the Russian Federation is its current view on interstate relations and the state-political regime, the so-called "Putinism", which today has a pronounced character, popularizes revanchist views among the population of the Russian Federation and carries out war propaganda. This is where the problem of this scientific research comes from.

1.1 Aims of the Thesis

The author clearly states that the main aim of the master thesis is to study the phenomenon of Putinism and prove that it is the existing ideology in the world and a political regime in the Russian Federation. Furthermore, there are different sub-aims of the master thesis. The phenomenon of Putinism is quite new and emerged recently but became one of the most controversial topics in the evolution of the 21st century in international politics.

- To present the ideology of Vladimir Putin.
- To investigate the economic and social notion of Putinism.
- To investigate and evaluate the geopolitical factor of Putinism.

Considering the sub aims of the research, they all in accordance with each other are designed to help answering the main research question:

- to understand the political and social climate of the newly independent emerging Russia in 90th.
- to investigate the relationships between economy of the country and the politics.
- to understand the notion of geopolitics and geoeconomics in the Russian Federation.
- to understand the notion of geopolitics of the 21st century on the world arena with regards to the Russian Federation.

At the beginning of the XXI century. the definition of "Putinism" has acquired several interpretations. This concept identifies:

- a type of authoritarian political regime that was formed in the Russian Federation in the early 2000s, in the era of globalization and the Internet.
- the use of the term "Putinism" mainly in a critical sense (as a combination of preventive measures and stagnation in an uncompetitive, economically weakened Russian Federation) was initiated by the mass media (Piontkovskyi 2020).

New York Times journalist U. Safir was one of the first to use it in relation to Russian President V. Putin in 2000, mainly in a journalistic sense to denote the cult of personality, censorship and militarism. One of the first in the Russian Federation to introduce the term "Putinism" into everyday use was political scientist A. Piontkovsky. The Russian political scientist A. Migranyan put a positive meaning in the definition of "Putinism", considering it as the restoration of the natural functions of the government after the period of oligopoly (a type of market structure of imperfect competition dominated by an extremely small number of firms) (Piontkovskyi 2020).

1.2 Research Objectives

The principal objective of this research is to find and identify the main “stones” of Putin’s regime: what characterizes it, what identifies it.

Hypothesis 1: Putinism is the main political regime in the Russian Federation

Null-hypothesis 1: Putinism is not the main political regime in the Russian Federation

Hypothesis 2: Putinism is an ideology in nowadays Russia.

Null-hypothesis 2: Putinism is not an ideology in nowadays Russia.

In modern scientific and political discourses, the concept of "Putinism" and the phenomenon behind it have become relevant and widely spread from articles in Wikipedia to its use in the speeches and statements of political figures of the world's leading countries. Putinism is a phenomenon. What do we mean by this? First of all, a specific type of policy, which at one time A. Merkel and her European and American colleagues from the top management qualified as regressive, inherent in the 18th century when the desire to achieve results was based on the politics of power and was carried out precisely from the position of power (Laqueur 2015).

However, Putinism is not limited to a particular political practice in foreign policy. Its point is primarily aimed at forming a specific domestic policy that reproduces the neo-empire on the Russian Federation's territory and, if possible, on the territory of the entire former Soviet Union. Hence neo-colonial wars on the outskirts of the former Soviet empire, information and psychological wars directed primarily against pro-independence and pro-European movements in the republics of the former USSR (Laqueur 2015).

The revanchist policy of the Kremlin leads to conflict in the post-Soviet space, creating real threats to the existence of independent states that emerged in the post-Soviet space. The policy of the modern Russian Federation also carries global threats. After all, Putinism is a new imperialism, a new bipolarity of the world. A new confrontation between East and West. However, now the neo-empire of the Kremlin is trying to pull the Middle East and China into its orbit, losing the possibility of controlling Eastern Europe in the form of a block of European "countries of the socialist camp." After all, Putinism is a prologue to the third world war and the global catastrophe of humanity (Laqueur 2015).

Putinism is a severe historical and civilizational challenge not only for the countries on the territory of the former USSR but also for the entire modern world. Many studies, both scientific and journalistic, have already been devoted to the study of its essence.

The purpose of the conducted scientific research is an attempt to investigate "Putinism" as a type of state-political regime, focusing on the strange symbiosis of power and society. In accordance with the set goal, the work focuses on solving the following tasks:

- definition of the concept and features of "Putinism"
- comparison of "Putinism" with other state-political regimes
- establishment of the determining role of public consciousness in the emergence, establishment, and further support of "Putinism"

The object of the study is "Putinism" as a variety of state-political regime. The subject of the study is the historical and legal characteristics of "Putinism".

1.3 Limitations

The first and the main limitation is my personal subjective point of view. In contrast, I tried to look at the sources and analyze them with objectivity. As I am proceeding to the professionalism in this work, the work is developed by looking at different sources. Furthermore, the topic of Ukraine is not covered in order to present the objective and clear view on Putinism. The topic itself is not researched fully. Not that many scholars wrote their work on this topic: either because they are based in the Russian Federation and have the fear of the president and his colleagues, or either it is just not their scope of interest, either they also lack information and do not want to base their research on propaganda. So, I can state that this work will present the unique thesis. As it was stated earlier about the lack of secondary sources, compared to other international relations topics, there are still some in an open access. There are few of scholars that were brave and curious enough to open this topic. There are not only articles, but also books that I will cite and base my research on.

2. Methodology

2.1 Primary Data Collection

I use mixed research methods for her work: qualitative as well as quantitative. The qualitative part will be used mainly for the literature reviews, content analysis and discourse analysis,

whether the quantitative method will be used for statistics and comparative tables. The qualitative analysis is the best for testing the hypothesis and theories. The quantitative method is better used for the constructivist school of thought.

The author of this master thesis uses both primary and secondary sources. Speaking about the primary sources, interviews, parts of news' broadcasts, newspaper articles are taken into the main consideration. As the topic of this master thesis work is new and emerged recently, the primary sources are the base for this work. I will examine all the public sources as well as the archives that are available online.

For the theoretical part of the master thesis, I will use the concepts of totalitarianism, authoritarianism. Definitions, historical background as well as the ideological base of these theories will help to figure out whether there is a "Putinism" and, if so, how it is different to the other political regimes. These are the main theoretical base for the work. Comparative analysis will be the main method for this part.

Two main schools of political thoughts will be used, such as realism and constructivism. The realism sees the state as the main actor. It assumes that world lives in anarchy and the principal task of the state is to secure itself from other states. The state can only rely on its own capabilities and resources. The constructivism sees an individual as the main actor. It relies on the historical, religious and social backgrounds of the individual. It explains the world from the point of a personal aspect and its influence on the domestic and foreign policies.

2.2 Secondary Data Collection

It is complicated to determine what the role of an individual in history depends on: on the individual, on the historical situation, historical laws, coincidences or regularities, expectations of fellow citizens, or on everything at once, in what combination and exactly how. The answer will largely depend on the chosen aspect, angle, point of view, the period of history, and other methodological aspects.

Several approaches to the problem of the role of the individual in the historical process crystallized. The first arises from consideration of the relationship between social conditions

and the individual characteristics of a person (in response to a request from society in a crisis period, a person appears who possesses a set of certain character traits that are necessary under these conditions). The second approach is related to the study of the scale of the influence of personality on historical events (personality cannot fundamentally change the objective logic of history on a global scale, but its actions can positively or negatively affect the course of history). The third approach to the problem is related to the consideration of the individual in history in connection with the peculiarities of the course of historical processes (the evolutionary and functional period of the development of society does not contribute to the disclosure of the personal qualities of people, and, on the contrary, in extreme situations that are turning points for the life of the state and citizens, the role of individuals whose names later become heroes in history is growing powerfully). I believe that the fourth approach to the consideration of the problem of the role of the individual in the historical process, which involves the analysis of the role of the historical individual in his relationship with the people (the people are the primary basis; therefore the individual depends on him; if the individual expresses the interests and expresses the demands of the broad masses of the people, then he acquires extraordinary social power), in the context of this article is the most productive.

3. Ideology. Chapter 1: What is Putinism?

3.1 Putin Coming to Power

Since 1990, Putin worked as an assistant vice-rector for international affairs at the university where he studied. After that, he became an adviser to the head of the Leningrad City Council.

From June 12, 1991 - head of the Committee on External Relations of the St. Petersburg City Hall during the administration of A. Sobchak (Hill and Gaddy 2015). In March 1994, he became the first deputy head of the government of St. Petersburg with broad powers.

Work in Moscow

Within a span of three years, he swiftly ascended the ranks from deputy head of presidential affairs to secretary of the Security Council. After the mayoral election defeat of A. Sobchak in August 1996, he received an invitation to join the President of the Russian Federation's team in Moscow as deputy head of affairs under Pavel Borodin. Subsequently, on March 26, 1997,

he assumed the position of deputy head of the Administration of the President of Russia, taking over the role of head of the Main Control Department from Oleksiy Kudrin. On May 25, 1998, he was appointed as the first deputy head of the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, where his responsibilities focused on regional affairs. Prior to his appointment, he had already gained recognition as one of the Kremlin's most influential figures. From July 25, 1998, he served as the director of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, concurrently holding the position of secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation since March 26, 1999, (Hill and Gaddy 2015).

At the head of the government and the state

On August 9, 1999, he was appointed temporary acting head of the government of the Russian Federation. On the same day, in his televised address, President Yeltsin named him as his successor. Since August 16, 1999, he has been the head of the government. On December 31, 1999, in connection with the voluntary resignation of Yeltsin, Putin became acting president of the Russian Federation unconstitutionally, by direct inheritance. Since March 26, 2000, the president of Russia has been elected. Took office on May 7, 2000.

On March 14, 2004, he was elected as the head of the Russian state for a second term. On May 7, 2008, the second presidential term of Vladimir Putin ended. On this day, Dmytro Medvedev took office as the President of the Russian Federation (Hill and Gaddy 2015).

At the head of the government (2008-2012)

During the 2007 State Duma elections, Putin took the lead position on the electoral list of the All-Russian political party "United Russia," despite not being a member of the party at that time. Remarkably, the party's federal list solely featured his name. At the 8th Congress of the party, Putin made known his willingness to assume the role of the head of the government of the Russian Federation following the conclusion of his presidential term. At the 9th Congress of "United Russia", he agreed to become the head of the party after the end of the presidential term. On May 7, after the inauguration of President Dmitry Medvedev, he became a candidate for the post of Prime Minister of Russia. On May 8, he was approved in this position by 392 votes of State Duma deputies (Hill and Gaddy 2015).

President of the Russian Federation

On September 24, 2011, at the suggestion of the third president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, he became a United Russia candidate in the 2012 presidential elections, and on March 4, 2012, he won in the first round. On May 5, the Chairman of the Central Committee of Russia announced that the presidential elections of Russia had taken place, and V.V. Putin was the winner for the third time. In the spring of 2012, Putin assumed the presidency of the Russian Federation for the third consecutive term, officially commencing his duties on May 7, 2012. Shortly after taking office, Putin proposed the appointment of former president Medvedev as the head of the Russian government, which was swiftly approved by the State Duma the following day (Hill and Gaddy 2015).

How did he get into the KGB, became the president of Russia, and why is he trying to hold on to power?

The answers to all these questions were revealed in his political bestseller by German journalist Boris Reitschuster. He wrote the book *Putinocracy. The man of power and his system*, which describes all aspects of Putin. From the book you can understand how exactly a man was able to bring the largest country to his knees, while turning the entire civilized world against him. Putin's amazing entry into the Kremlin started in 90th. In 1999, no one doubted that the days of Yeltsin and his clan were coming to an end. Therefore, in August of that year, the public was not surprised when an elderly sick person with a scrawny face and a trembling voice introduced the new prime minister - a blond from the backyards of Leningrad, who made his way to the very top of power - Vladimir Putin, at that time the head of the intelligence service, known only to persons interested in politics. In the parliament, the deputies joke about the newcomer, calling him "Vladlenovich" (a hint of the once popular name Vladlen, made up of "Vladimir" and "Lenin") (Reitschuster 2006).

One of the newspapers noticed Putin's "charm of a dried shark." With his pale face and signs of permanent fatigue, Putin enters the political scene as an actor playing a role he does not like. The newcomer spent a long time on ceremony, recalls the oligarch Boris Berezovsky, an influential person who contributed to Putin's rise to the top, and a few years later - his bitter enemy. If Berezovsky is to be believed, he would be more impressed to be the head of Gazprom, the giant Russian gas concern. Putin is still reminded of this. After the meeting with Putin, the Prosecutor General was taken to the hospital with a heart attack. Because the prosecutor did not give in, the film was shown on the state RTR channel, and now the current

topic is not corruption and mismanagement, but the habits of the prosecutor general (as a result of the scandal, he was forced to resign). The director of the state television and radio company, VDTK, whose channels showed outrageous pictures, became the minister of culture when Putin moved to the Kremlin (Reitschuster 2006).

When the ailing Yeltsin announced Putin, newly appointed as prime minister, as his successor, many institutions for the study of electoral preferences perceived it as a political death sentence for the newcomer: "Tsar Boris" was so hated by the people that his blessing could have been anything but not a characteristic for creating a positive image. In public opinion polls, the level of approval of Putin's candidacy barely exceeds the freezing point. Most sociological studies cannot fail to agree on a general conclusion: only a miracle or a catastrophe can change something. And disasters happen a few weeks later, in December 1999. Residential buildings explode in Buynaksk, Volgograd and Moscow, over three hundred people died. Two and a half years later, Putin's former close friend Boris Berezovsky, who has fallen out of favor during this time, claims that the Russian secret service staged the bomb explosions to change the domestic political mood in Putin's favor. He could not provide convincing evidence, but there is a long list of strange things (Reitschuster 2006).

Thus, on September 22, 1999, the authorities of Ryazan, near Moscow, proudly announced that they had found a bomb in a residential building and prevented an explosion. However, when the trail brought Chechnya to the secret service instead, they explained that it was just a lesson. One of the prosecutors, who represented the victims in court, ended up behind bars under rather mysterious circumstances. Witnesses began to disappear without a trace. During the time when the Russian authorities tried to refute many facts that substantiated the suspicion of committing a crime, it was impossible not to conclude that the security services were involved in the explosions. In any case, Vladimir Putin would not have been able to become the president of Russia without the help of bomb terror and the subsequent Chechen war (Reitschuster 2006).

Thus, shortly before the Duma elections, Putin's rating rises to a level above 50%. The Chechen war is a central theme in the election campaign; the government rejects criticism of Putin from the opposition as "unpatriotic". With 23.2%, Putin's newly formed Unity party comes in second place behind the Communists, and political rivals complain of massive propaganda, discrediting campaigns and increased armed security of the authorities. Yeltsin's "clan" contributed to the fact that the election results took on an unexpected character - 13 days after

them, on New Year's Eve 2000, the old president announced his resignation with tears in his eyes. According to the Constitution, he could no longer run for office in future elections, but Putin could become his successor, thus starting the election campaign with a significant advantage (Reitschuster 2006).

As a ruling president, he can not only count on a huge "royal" bonus, but also keep the entire state apparatus under control - an important factor in a country where the so-called "administrative resource" is decisive in elections. With his first official act in the Kremlin, already on December 31, 1999, the acting president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, demonstrated what was the main motive of the Yeltsin clan when transferring power: the new head of state guarantees his predecessor with his own decree complete impunity, even in the future; later he gives the Decree the force of law. Putin becomes the guarantor that Yeltsin's numerous "family" will not be brought to justice for alleged but obvious corruption. When Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia, the residence of the Federal Chancellor of Germany had a new owner for almost a year, who started by saying that there is no place for "friendship in the sauna" in German-Russian relations: during his election campaign, Gerhard Schröder fiercely criticized close relations between Helmut Kohl (CDU) and Boris Yeltsin, announcing new relations with Russia, based on sober and pragmatic principles.

In the days when Putin first enters the Moscow "White House" on the banks of the Moskva River, and later - the Kremlin, relations between Germany and Russia are in an ice age. Vladimir Putin has been terrorizing the world for years, and more than one country has suffered from his "liberation" (Laqueur 2015).

3.2 90th

Since 1991, Russia has found itself in a fundamentally new situation. What are the results of the country's policy in the last decade 20th century? There are different opinions on this account, both pessimistic and optimistic. The most important events took place at the end of the century. It was in the 90s that it became obvious that the historical dispute between the Bolshevik model of socialism and the capitalism of industrialized countries was resolved in favor West. After 1991, the foreign policy course changed radically Russia, its relations with NATO: ending the policy of expansion and confrontation, Moscow made a decisive

contribution to the improvement of the international climate, ensured success in the development of dialogue, mutual understanding, cooperation and partnership with the democratic countries of the West. Eliminating the division of the world into two antagonistic systems eliminates the foundations of confrontational bloc politics in Europe. This fact, as well as the development of international cooperation, opened the prospect of building a new world order in which Russia will be a part of world society. In 1992 Russia was busy searching for its place in the post-confrontational world, making certain adjustments in its relations with the countries of the world as necessary (Trenin 2019).

Much has also been achieved in relation to the CIS. It was thanks to the state that the process of reintegration within the Union began. However, a lot of mistakes were made on this front, which led to the strengthening of anti-Russian sentiments in the former Soviet Union republics. This shows the dubiousness of an unequivocal attitude to the policy carried out both in the CIS and in Asia and Europe. We should not idealize the real situation and silence the obvious: in Russia and the West (in particular) there were unresolved problems, differences of interests and views, different assessments of certain events. In addition, there are many facts that suggest that NATO is still trying to see Russia as an enemy. In general, a lot remained unsettled and unresolved (Manucharyan 2008).

In this part, I would like to show Russia from a different side than we usually see it. There are too many vestiges of the old, too few new problems have been solved by our government. Take, for example, the Chernobyl tragedy. We know about the difficult fate of the liquidators of Chernobyl: for many years, the authorities have cynically failed to fulfill their obligations. But what happened to them on October 25 in Moscow is particularly shameful.

The whole country is following the epic of pulling out the bodies of the dead sailors of the "Kursk", and at the same time, against the living - still alive - disabled liquidators, who came to the capital to express their protest against the indifferent attitude of the authorities towards them, police lines are being set up. They were not allowed to go to Red Square, where they wanted to collect their orders and medals, they were surrounded and herded into buses, expelled from Moscow. The policemen, talking to each other on the phones, called them mutants. In Tula, their comrades start an indefinite hunger strike. Again! And all this is on the periphery of public opinion and mass media. (How little attention is already paid to the Chechen war.) Everyone was occupied with the Kursk operation or the collapse of the American skyscrapers,

everyone sympathized with the relatives of the dead sailors and the families of the Americans, but they forgot that those who died in Chechnya also had relatives. As well as the situation with disabled people from Chernobyl. The situation was almost pathological (Hanson-Green 2017).

In the last version of the concept of foreign policy, there is also some nonsense.

It is said: in the interests of Russia "as a great power, as one of the influential centers of the modern world" it is necessary to seek "the formation of a multipolar system of international relations." (Affairs 2018) Why does they need it when Russia is already "the center of the world", responsible "for maintaining security in the world both at the global and regional level." (Affairs 2018) The authors of the concept of foreign policy would first define what it is "great power" and what is the difference between a "world pole" and a "center of power". And they would prove how it is possible to claim one of the "poles" with a GDP of approximately 300 billion dollars. And how to explain why countries with a GDP that exceeded Russia's by 5 or even 13 times (Japan) do not claim to be a "center of power" or at least to some "polar region", while impoverished and hungry Russia is (World Bank 2023).

The formed socio-economic system has recently been insufficiently effective. There was no legal protection of property rights and domestic producers. Has a plan for social protection of the population been developed? The size of the external debt did not decrease; annual payments on it already exceeded half of the federal budget. In the same way, the cooperation of the Russian Federation with the CIS member states continues to deepen. The progress of integration processes faced obstacles due to various factors, with the instability of leadership in certain Commonwealth countries occupying a significant position among them. The disintegration of the USSR brought about significant changes to Russia's position on the global stage and its political and economic interactions with other nations. The foreign policy framework of the Russian Federation emphasized the importance of safeguarding territorial integrity and independence while creating favorable conditions for the growth of a market-based economy and integration into the international community. Central objectives included securing recognition of Russia as the legitimate successor of the former Soviet Union within the United Nations and seeking assistance from West to implement reform initiatives. Foreign trade played a crucial role, as it was seen to overcome the economic crisis within the country (Manucharyan 2008).

The reforms of the 1990s had a global impact on the life of Russian society. As a result of radical transformations, the crime rate increased sharply, unemployment increased, the population's high mortality rate, the low birth rate, and the level of real incomes. The transition to the market, as I have already mentioned, is a very complex and long process. Many more years will pass before we see the results of reforms in the Russian economy. But this is already an indicator of denial of Russia and let the transition to the market take place very painfully.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new era in Russian history. This event had a profound impact on the political, economic, and social situation in Russia. In this essay, we will explore the changes that occurred in these areas in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse:

- **Political Situation.** The political situation in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union was marked by a period of instability and uncertainty. The country's political system underwent a significant transformation as the Soviet-style planned economy gave way to a market-oriented system. The transition was difficult and often chaotic, as the country struggled to adapt to the demands of a market-based economy. In the early years of post-Soviet Russia, there was a surge in nationalism and populism. This was evident in the rise of ultra-nationalist parties, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, which gained considerable support in the early 1990s. There was also a surge in populist movements, such as the movement led by Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, who became a popular figure in the mid-1990s. The instability and chaos of the early post-Soviet period were exacerbated by the weak and ineffective government. The government was unable to control the country's economic and political situation, and corruption was rampant. This led to a decline in public trust in government institutions and a rise in disillusionment and frustration among the population. The situation began to change in the late 1990s when Vladimir Putin came to power. Putin's presidency marked a shift towards a more authoritarian political system, as he centralized power in the presidency and cracked down on political opposition. While Putin's leadership has been criticized for its lack of political freedoms, it has also been credited with stabilizing the country and improving its economy (Plokhyy 2021).
- **Economic Situation.** The collapse of the Soviet Union had a significant impact on Russia's economy. The country's transition from a planned to a market economy was

difficult and often chaotic, resulting in a period of economic decline and instability. During the 1990s, Russia experienced a sharp decline in GDP and a surge in inflation. The country's infrastructure and industrial base were severely damaged, and there was a significant decline in living standards for much of the population. The economic situation was further exacerbated by the country's debt crisis in the late 1990s. The situation began to improve in the early 2000s as the government implemented economic reforms and made efforts to attract foreign investment. The country's economy began to grow, and GDP increased steadily. In 2003, the government implemented a series of economic reforms aimed at improving the country's business climate and attracting foreign investment. One of the key factors in the country's economic recovery was the rise in oil prices in the early 2000s. Russia is a major oil producer, and the rise in oil prices provided a significant boost to the country's economy. The government used the revenues generated by the oil industry to invest in infrastructure and social programs, which helped to improve living standards for much of the population (Plokhly 2021).

- **Social Situation.** The collapse of the Soviet Union had a profound impact on Russian society. The country's transition from a socialist to a capitalist system led to significant changes in social and cultural norms. One of the most significant changes was the decline in the status of women. During the Soviet era, women had significant rights and opportunities, and were encouraged to participate in the workforce. However, in the post-Soviet era, there has been a significant decline in the status of women, and there has been a rise in gender-based violence. Another significant change has been the rise of organized crime. In the chaotic post-Soviet era, organized crime syndicates took advantage of the weak government and the country's transition period (Plokhly 2021).

3.3 Ideology

Leon Aron, head of the Russian research department of the American Enterprise Institute, sounded the alarm in early 2013, at the beginning of Obama's second term. At that time, he had a whole cycle of articles about the policy of the Russian government. The most prominent of them was the "Putin Doctrine," published in the authoritative magazine *Foreign Affairs*. It does not contain the word "Putinism," but the word combination in the title can be considered its synonym: "doctrine" is a big word, synonymous with "theories" and "concepts." Aron

shouts: everything the Kremlin does is not random, situational. This is the steadfast implementation of the foreign and domestic political "Putin doctrine" (Aron 2013).

At the same time, the researcher does not make any great inventions, relying on the foundation of insiders. He simply systematically puts together a puzzle of facts: Russia's budget, its actions, not words. Moreover, of course, Aron closes his ears to the chatter of Putin's intellectual sixes inside and outside the Erephy, to "useful idiots" of various spectrums. According to Aron, the essence of "Putin's doctrine" consists of a number of interdependent positions (2013). This strengthens control over domestic political events, courts, mass media, and, in Lenin's language, "occupation of the commanding heights in the economy," especially the oil and gas sector. This is the establishment of a besieged fortress regime in the country, growing anti-Americanism around the world and separate policy in the nuclear sphere. That is what Aron gently but clearly formulated as "carrying out the political, economic, military and cultural reintegration of the post-Soviet space." Accordingly, Aron advised the Obama administration to stop thinking about something like a "reset" and, to put it mildly, take a "strategic pause" in communication with Moscow to develop a more specific policy (Aron 2013).

All the trends indicated by him received strong development. Nevertheless, he was wrong about one thing: "The Russian people themselves will play the decisive role in shaping the future of American-Russian relations, and the success of their democratic impulse seems closer today than at any time since 1991." (Aron 2013) This mistake remained with him for a long time perhaps because of his close friendship with Russian oppositionists. Today, Aron only has to write articles about Putin with headlines like "One man's struggle to save the honor of Russia." (2013) However, the very formulation of the "Putin doctrine", a warning about the impending danger, of the rise of Putinism, is very timely.

In the same year, 2013, a book by the Dutch researcher Marcel Van Herpen, director of the Cicero Foundation in Maastricht, was published (Herpen and Marcel 2013). The book was called meaningfully - "Putinism". There is nothing special, scholars are already used to this word. But the subtitle was sharp: "The slow rise of the radical right-wing regime in Russia." (Herpen and Marcel 2013) The radical right-wing regime is a close relative, or even a synonym, of fascism/Nazism. Moreover, Van Herpen, which is important, wrote about it not in a small

column, not in a medium-sized article, but in a book with 12 chapters and two hundred pages (2013).

The primary method used by the Dutchman is quite risky - comparative analysis. However, Van Herpen's comparative analysis is extensive, well-founded, and attentive to details and differences. Therefore, the conclusions drawn by him are surprisingly accurate. To make it more transparent, it is enough to name the three parts grouped into 12 chapters: 1. "Weimar Russia": the validity of the historical parallel. 2: The specter of fascist Russia. 3: Putinism, Bonapartism and Berlusconiism. Since around 2004, the Russian opposition has had "Stalin-elite" as a popular designation for Putin's regime. Furthermore, Van Herpen at the beginning of the book, defines it as "an unstable system of hybrid "fascism-light", which combines elements of proto- fascism, fascism and post-fascism. These three words provide the key to the following extended analogies. Proto-fascism – comparison with Bonapartism of Napoleon III; fascism is an analogy with the classical formation of Mussolini; post-fascism – a comparison with the powerful methods of the super-populist of the new era, Berlusconi (Herpen and Marcel 2013).

At the end of the study, Van Herpen clarifies his definition of "Putinism", which also becomes the title of the last 12th chapter. It is "a hybrid multi-layered combination of Bonapartism, Berlusconiism, and Mussolini fascism." (Herpen and Marcel 2013) He draws attention to the popularity of the word "hybrid." The author is well aware of Putin's KGB origin and his methods and pays much attention to it.

There are two more essential conclusions of Van Herpen. The first: Putinism is "a new radical right-wing political model that is ready to be exported abroad." (Herpen and Marcel 2013) Indeed, Russian diplomacy and propaganda have significantly promoted this model for export. So by 2018, they even started talking about the rise of Euro-Putinism. At the very end, the second conclusion is even more unpleasant and, unfortunately, accurate: the Putinism is dynamic and this regime will further radicalize. Moreover, this was written even before the start of Euromaidan. This author is best known for his book "Putin's Wars. Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine: unlearned lessons of the past", published in 2015 (in the original, the subtitle is more general - "The Rise of Russian New Imperialism") (Herpen and Marcel 2013). "Putinism," unfortunately, remained unnoticed.

In 2017, the American Journal of Democracy prepared six materials under the general slogan "The Kremlin is inspired." The text of the political science professor of the University of California, Stephen Fish, "What is Putinism?" was vital in it. This material is also helpful to read as a typical critical example. The authors' individual ideas and views are accurately given. Here is the beginning: "Once again, Russia is ruled by a self-confident elite that claims to be the ultimate alternative to liberal democracy. And Russian leaders have only grown more confident as they have witnessed the rise of politicians abroad—even in the United States—whose mentality resonates with their own. How can we determine the regime that Vladimir Putin and his associates support at home and Trump abroad? Putinism is a form of autocracy that is conservative, populist and personalist." (Fish 2017) Fish trusts Putin's words too much about the rejection of ethnic chauvinism and religious radicalism. Speaking about Putin's conservatism, he exaggerates it and makes it a core characteristic. For him, Putin's traditional values are boastful, nationalist, but ethnically inclusive, demobilizing. Moreover, that is it. There is no idea about the mobilizing "Putin Doctrine" or "the rise of the far-right regime." (Fish 2017)

Fish talks about the "illiberal crusade of Putinism", but he does not find fundamental dynamics and possibly severe consequences in it. He considers the same conservatism as the basis of the Kremlin's vision, which at some stage still restrains extremes. Fish sees the destructive actions of Putin but considers them oddities and does not believe in the radicalization of the Russian ruler (Fish 2017).

Brian Taylor's book "The Code of Putinism" (2018) was written in five years. For this, the author sifted through and systematized hundreds of Putin's speeches, interviews, and remarks. This is logical: if we are already talking about the personalist regime: knowing the person, it is easier to understand why and how he built power for himself. At the same time, Taylor also expanded the area of consideration to Putin's close circle. According to the author's idea, "The Code of Putinism" shows the collective mentality of Putin and his close associates (Taylor 2018). This is a set of ideas, habits and emotions that determine their decisions in the economy, internal and external politics. All together gives an understanding of why Putin's Russia is both ineffective at home and overly ambitious abroad.

According to Taylor, the key ideas of the Putinist code include conservatism, anti-Americanism, and the importance of a strong state at home and abroad (2018). The dominant

tricks of Putin and his associates are control, order, and loyalty. Important feelings that drive Russian rulers include a need for respect, resentment for lost status and mistreatment by the West, and vulnerability (Taylor 2018). This last word, is defined as one of the feelings in “the Code of Putinism”.

Taylor also has another conclusion, which, unfortunately, has not been confirmed. In one of the interviews, he said that he does not consider Putin as a reflection of Russian political culture or Russian political history. Accordingly, the researcher denies the organic connection between Putinism and "Russianism". In his opinion, Putin and his team imposed their position on the entire developed and "advanced" country, and now they are "holding back Russia." (Taylor 2018) The researcher does not take into account or downplays the importance of the imperial complexes of Russians - the same "Russism". However, otherwise, this is also an influential book that shows many origins of Putin's regime.

Russian politicians and academics were also not idle. However, "Putinism" has not become a widespread concept. Moreover, in 2018, a detailed description of "Putinism" as such, as well as its research both in Russia and abroad, appeared for the first time: "'Putinism" as a social phenomenon and its perspectives.” (Chernozub 2018). Oleg Chornozub, head of the Center for Socio-Economic Research in the Academy of National Economy and Civil Service under the President of the Russian Federation, prepared it.

4. Society. Chapter 2: Putinism is inrooted into Russia’s political regime

4.1 Opposition Forces

The political history of the modern Russian opposition is just one of those episodes that has been repeated many times over the last five centuries of Russian history, starting with Ivan the Terrible. It is in the West that liberals and conservatives play the political card with each other, emphasizing the level of state intervention in business practices. As for Russia, this discourse between liberals and conservatives, between "Westerners" and "Slavophiles" has its own specificity.

Either the state controls everything in a person's life (simplified interpretation of Russian conservatism), or it still limits this influence (Russian liberals), because it remembers that it is part of Europe, where human freedom is a value, not an empty sound. Such a fatal fate of choosing between black and white in the political process undoubtedly leaves its mark on Russian political practices, on elite competition, and on the tradition of forming the opposition. Systemic opposition is a political luxury for the political process in Russia.

The periods of calm, competitive coexistence of different approaches to political practice among the political class were short-lived, ending with the fact that in any case one of the players established a monopoly and destroyed competitors. Starting from the end of the 90s of the 20th centuries. Russia got another chance to create a political process understandable for the rest of Europe, which involves competition in the middle of the political system, the existence of the opposition, a peaceful transfer of power through the electoral process from one political actor to another.

During the 1990s, the "Yeltsin era", liberals became part of the government, part of the political elite and significantly and severely limited their influence on the conservative system (in 1993, they shot the parliament, which was dominated by communist influence). But Russian society did not take advantage of another chance to build a transparent political system with predictable political practices. Russian paternalism brought V. Putin to power, who in the first ten years of the XXI century. pushed the liberals out of the system to the political margins, and within the system he left as competitors political "freaks" like the LDPR V. Zhirinovsky, against the background of which Putin himself looked like a completely pro-Western and civilized politician until recently.

The political situation in the Russian Federation in a certain way determines the level of Russian scientific and expert discourse regarding the state and prospects of the opposition movement. To generalize, some scientists believe that in modern Russia there is both a moderate parliamentary opposition, open to dialogue and cooperation with the authorities, and a radical opposition (combination of parties, NGOs, and movements not represented in the State Duma), which is legitimate and strives for a complete renewal of the current government, radical changes in the political system and state structure of the Russian Federation (Medvedev and Borisenko 2007).

Proponents of this approach recognize that, firstly, the parliamentary opposition is part of the authoritarian political regime of the modern Russian Federation; secondly, almost all opposition parties represented in the Russian parliament were created with the direct participation of the Presidential Administration (Davydenko 2013). Other researchers, within the framework of the discourse on the nature and specifics of the activities of the Russian opposition, do not see signs of radicalism, targeting systemic changes in the regime in that part of the opposition that is not included in representative authorities and deprived of the opportunity to participate in the formation of political decisions, and suggest to use a more restrained definition of "extra-system / non-system" (Bolshakov 2011).

As Ivan Bolshakov writes, in modern Russia, the confrontation of "non-systemic democrats" and the government does not have signs of a value-ideological struggle, but is more like a personal, personal confrontation (2011, p. 112). It is important that supporters of both "radical" discourse and "non-systemic" in determining the status of that part of the political class, which is deprived of influence on the development and adoption of political decisions, agree that these politicians have a weak resource base, use mainly virtual ("network ») tools of political activity and low level of support from society.

Within the scope of this article, we will try to briefly outline the stages of evolution and specifics of the opposition movement in modern Russia and determine the prospects for the development of the Russian political system precisely through the prism of the prospects of the opposition. It will be recalled that the fierce confrontation within the political class of two diametrically opposed camps (the president and liberal democrats, on the one hand, and the leadership of the Duma of the Russian Federation and conservatives and former communists, on the other) ended with the shooting of the parliament (October 1993) and creation of legislative conditions for the beginning of the concentration of power within the institution of the presidency.

Individual opposition activists became legitimate actors of the electoral process and some of them even managed to win a decent number of votes in regional and local elections. Such positive dynamics provided the basis for the Russian political scientist V. Gelman to claim that Russia is experiencing a complex revival of the political opposition (Helman 2014). According to the researcher, this positive trend is caused by three factors:

- a change of generations in the environment of the opposition. Thus, in 2013, the leaders of "RPR-Parnassus" B. Nemtsov (53 years old) and Mykhailo Kasyanov (55 years old) nominated the only candidate for the post of mayor of Moscow, 37-year-old O. Navalny.
- Medvedev's modernization program, which was more declared than implemented during his presidency (2008–2011) but contained something that slightly leveled public dissatisfaction – liberal rhetoric, a desire to show the openness of the decision-making process from the side authorities and easing pressure on civil society.
- a change in the political strategy of the opposition, which began to use "network" tools to fight the regime and populist rhetoric (Helman 2014).

O. Navalny's anti-corruption campaign serves as an illustration. However, the author suggests that it would be fair to say that the opposition, during the wave of mass protests in 2011-2012, fell victim to its own achievements, as it was ill-equipped to address new organizational and strategic challenges (Helman 2014). The development of events at that time was so fast that the opposition had neither time nor resources to win a victory over the regime.

The latter managed to avoid the risks of elite desertion – and even the systemic opposition refused to cooperate with the protesters. Under these conditions, the Kremlin easily managed to seize the initiative. The opposition was unable to oppose the "tightening of the nuts".

What is the agenda for the Russian opposition at the current stage? At the end of the 20th century political scientist Alfred Stepan identified the lessons of the struggle of the Latin American opposition against authoritarianism as relevant for post-communist Europe. Today, these lessons are relevant for modern Russia. So, Stepan provided his list of tasks for opposition actors in terms of the democratization of authoritarian regimes: first, resistance to co-optation by the regime; the second is the preservation of areas of autonomy of society in relation to the regime; third – undermining the legitimacy of the regime; the fourth is the preservation of the price increase zones of the authoritarian rule and, finally, the fifth is the creation of a convincing democratic alternative to the regime (Stephen 1990). According to the already mentioned Helman, the fulfillment of the fifth task in particular - the creation of a meaningful democratic alternative to the regime - seems to be the most difficult (Helman 2014).

The lack of clarity on this matter and the absence of a constructive and practical vision for the future hinder the opposition from uniting dissident forces and independent social actors.

Political and economic entities who distance themselves from the Kremlin and the established opposition are still reluctant to support the non-systemic opposition. The opposition's relative isolation is also a result of the fact that the Russian population does not perceive it as a viable alternative to the current regime. Even among critics of the Kremlin, (for example, Ksenia Sobchak, the daughter of Anatoliy Sobchak) some view the preservation of the political status quo as a lesser evil compared to the potential consequences of regime collapse, which may not necessarily lead to positive changes. The public appeals and rhetoric of emerging opposition leaders are either excessively abstract or overly populist.

In such a situation, those who, at best, called for Putin's resignation yesterday, should answer the questions - how to change the political system in order to deprive the president of the influence he has now, how to open social elevators during the electoral procedures and how to go about the decentralization of power in the Russian Federation instead of the hyper-centralized regional and local power that is functioning today.

4.2 Oligarchs

During Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia experienced a distressing and profound consequence: a steep decline into a seemingly insurmountable pit of corruption. The country has earned the dubious distinction of being officially recognized as one of the most "advanced" nations in terms of officials engaging in theft. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, which tracks global corruption, has consistently ranked Russia poorly during Putin's tenure, plummeting to the 143rd position. This places Russia among the most corrupt countries, alongside nations such as Indonesia and Angola. Comparatively, Russia trails far behind countries like Ukraine and Georgia. The decline is stark when considering that Russia was placed at a relatively more favorable position of 82nd in the index back in 2000 (Balog 2015). Presently, the country has nearly reached the bottom. The INDEM Foundation reveals that since 2001, the volume of corrupt transactions in Russia has surged from less than \$40 billion annually to over \$300 billion (Balog 2015). Bribes and bureaucratic racketeering have pervaded various aspects of the country's operations. Putin's shrewdness has outmaneuvered the oligarchs and corrupt officials who thrived on the reforms of the 1990s. While corruption was present during that time, it was at least openly acknowledged and reported on by a free press.

At present, the embezzlement committed by officials reaches staggering amounts, yet it remains concealed from public view. Behind the scenes, the owners of significant assets operate under the cover of numerous undisclosed beneficiaries, powerful individuals known as "friends of President Putin." The identities of the true owners are cared by the intelligence agencies, and any discussion of corruption within the upper levels of power is strictly forbidden in the media under Kremlin control.

Simultaneously, bribery and the fusion of officials with business interests have become commonplace at every level of government, whether federal, regional, or local. While advocating for measures against the resurgence of oligarchs, a new oligarchy, even more influential than before, has rapidly amassed wealth at the expense of the Russian people. This includes the transfer of valuable assets from state ownership into the hands of private individuals, the acquisition of property from oligarchs at exorbitant prices using public funds, the establishment of a monopoly by President Putin's associates over the export of Russian oil, and the creation of a clandestine financial system within the Kremlin. These elements contribute to the portrait of a criminal governance system that has taken shape under Putin's leadership.

"Gazprom," often regarded as a "champion" in the transfer of crucial assets to undisclosed entities, played a significant role. Within a mere three-year period, and without any competitive processes, Gazprom facilitated the transfer of three highly important financial assets that contributed to the company's cash flows. The process was conducted through an opaque procedure. The first instance involved Gazprom's company. In 2005, Sogaz was transferred to the ownership of structures associated with the St. Petersburg-based bank, Rossiya. At the time, Rossiya Bank's total assets were approximately equivalent to the value of Sogaz, which amounted to \$1 billion. Notably, the transfer of Sogaz did not occur through an open auction but rather directly to this small St. Petersburg bank. In 2006, the pension reserves of the Gazfond pension fund, totaling over \$6 billion, were placed under the management of structures affiliated with Rossiya Bank. Later, towards the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, these funds were utilized to acquire more than 50% of the shares of Gazprombank. As a result, by the end of 2007, Gazprombank had become the second-largest bank in Russia in terms of assets, following Sberbank (Smirnov 2014).

Yuri Kovalchuk, the chairman of the board of directors of Bank Rossiya, has been identified as the largest shareholder of the bank, which was established in 1990 with the involvement of the manager of the Leningrad Regional Committee of the CPSU. Kovalchuk has had a longstanding relationship with President Putin since their time in St. Petersburg. However, the complete ownership structure of the bank remains unknown.

One notable scheme orchestrated by Putin's associates from Ross Bank involved the acquisition of the prominent Gazprom-Media holding. Prior to falling into the hands of Kovalchuk and his associates, Gazprombank's media assets were transferred to them in July 2005. This included the Gazprom-Media group and stakes in 2 television channels, which Gazprombank acquired for a mere \$1 million (Gazprom 2006). However, two years later, in July 2007, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev estimated Gazprom Media's assets to be in the billions of dollars (Segodnya 2007). Consequently, it appears that Gazprom gave away these assets to President Putin's friends at a fraction of their actual worth. This scam makes the loans-for-shares auctions of the past seem comparatively more honest and transparent.

The concentration of media assets in the hands of Yuri Kovalchuk extends beyond mere business interests. It represents a comprehensive political resource strategically aimed at influencing public consciousness on a massive scale. Essentially, Kovalchuk has gained control over a colossal non-state media conglomerate that encompasses four major television channels. In addition, this media empire includes influential newspapers like Komsomolskaya Pravda, numerous radio companies, and newspapers. This vast media empire, often referred to as "Putin's media," stands as a significant competitor to state-controlled television channels and other media outlets. Its influence surpasses the capabilities of previous media figures such as Gusinsky and Berezovsky. It is difficult to imagine that such a resource would not be utilized to serve Putin's political interests. It is completely understandable that it was "a pleasure" for Putin. Furthermore, Yuri Kovalchuk's brother, Mikhail, holds a prominent position as the head of the Kurchatov Institute. Additionally, he got the place of the acting vice-president of the Russian Academy of Sciences, responsible for allocating the 130 billion rubles from the budget designated for "nanotechnologies." Moreover, Yuri Kovalchuk's son, Boris, who formerly served as an adviser to Deputy Prime Minister, currently leads the Russian government's department overseeing "state interests." This department manages the funds allocated to these "interests". Overall, the Kovalchuk family's extensive influence extends beyond the media realm, permeating scientific research and governmental projects (Belton 2020).

Gazprom is not the sole entity subjected to plunder during Putin's tenure. In 2004, a significant development occurred through an additional issuance of shares in Svyaz-Bank, which was originally established in the 1990s to cater specifically to state communications enterprises. This issuance resulted in over 50% of the bank's shares being owned by a company called RTK-Leasing. Subsequently, various industry companies that were previously serviced by different banks began redirecting their accounts to Svyaz-Bank. Concerns regarding these actions prompted the Consumer Rights Protection Society to request an audit from the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Accounts Chamber at the beginning of 2005. However, the case was subsequently put on hold, and no further action was taken (Belton 2020).

The owner of RTK-Leasing is Jeffrey Galmondvi, a Danish lawyer frequently associated with the Russian Minister of Information Technologies and Communications, Leonid Reiman. However, the true beneficiaries behind these arrangements remain undisclosed. These instances exemplify how major assets were transferred out of state control under Putin's leadership and into the hands of private individuals. Another notable instance of this pattern was the controversial buyout of a large stake in Sibneft from oligarch Roman Abramovich, who was a close friend of Putin. The transaction took place in September 2005, with a staggering price tag of \$13.7 billion (Segodnya 2007). It is worth noting that the state itself was unable to purchase Sibneft, as the company has been the lowest among Russia's vertically located oil monopolies at that time, with declining production. Consequently, the state could have acquired it for a much lower price, especially considering that Abramovich initially gained control of the company for a mere \$100 million. However, Sibneft was purchased at an artificially inflated, maximum price. Furthermore, half of the purchase was covered directly by the politicians. In summer 2006, the state, through a specially established holding with the name Rosneftegaz, paid Gazprom \$7.2 billion. In return, the state received a 10.7% stake in Gazprom itself (Segodnya 2007). It is worth noting that these shares were the same ones that, 12 years prior in 1993, President Yeltsin had authorized Gazprom to repurchase using vouchers. The state had the opportunity to increase its stake in Gazprom completely free of charge by redeeming these shares (Belton 2020).

These examples highlight how assets were transferred from state ownership to private individuals at significantly inflated prices, often with the state directly financing a portion of

the transactions. Why was it necessary to allocate over a billion dollars of state funds, along with using money from Gazprom's budget, to pay Abramovich in order to push the state's stake in Gazprom? After all, the authorities already had significant control over the company. This raises questions about the motive behind these transactions. Similarly, why to give \$13.7 billion for Sibneft, if it could be acquired for a much lower price? (Segodnya 2007) Throughout 2005, there was a deliberate effort to artificially inflate the price of Sibneft's shares by spreading rumors of Gazprom's impending purchase. The share price rose from \$3 at the beginning of the year to \$4 during the transaction (Gazprom 2006). If Gazprom had bought the 75% stake in Sibneft in January 2005, they would have saved over \$3 billion. So, why was Abramovich overpaid for Sibneft? Moreover, the true owners of Millhouse, the entity that sold Sibneft to Gazprom, remain unknown (Belton 2020).

Furthermore, why was there a need to nationalize Sibneft? If it had been acquired by private owners, the company's efficiency would likely have remained intact, unlike under Gazprom's control. This would have saved the state from having to pay such exorbitant amounts for the company. The identities of those behind this intermediary structure remain undisclosed. It is important to note that all of these questionable practices involving Gazprom occurred during the tenure of President Putin's successor, Dmitry Medvedev, who chaired the company's board of directors. The extent of his personal involvement in these schemes raises further questions (Belton 2020).

Another questionable practice during Putin's era is the remarkable growth of the previously obscure Swiss oil trader Gunvor. Today, Gunvor handles the export of approximately one-third of Russia's oil, including a significant portion of oil produced by Surgutneftegaz, Gazpromneft, Rosneft, and other companies. This amounts to controlling annual oil exports worth at least \$40 billion. Initially, there were discussions about establishing a state monopoly on oil exports when Putin came to power. While a monopoly was indeed established, it turned out to be private rather than state-owned. Behind Gunvor is Gennady Timchenko, an old acquaintance of Putin from their time in early ages. The Guardian, Gunvor's co-manager, Thorbjorn Tornqvist, acknowledged the existence of a "third co-owner" within the powerful oil trading company, but the identity of this individual remains unknown (Belton 2020).

The ownership of Surgutneftegaz, Gunvor's primary oil supplier, is also shrouded in mystery. It is believed that the current CEO, Vladimir Bogdanov, controls the company through a

network of intermediary firms. However, there is another theory suggesting that Bogdanov sold his shares to undisclosed individuals associated with the levels of Russian elite, including Timchenko and Putin, back in 2002-2003 (Rosbank n.d.). The veracity of this claim has yet to be confirmed. While different oil monopolies uncapped the identities of their true bosses, the actual ownership of Surgutneftegaz remains undisclosed (Tikhomirov 2022).

In May 2006, the Zurich arbitration tribunal made a significant finding regarding the Bermuda-based IPOC fund, which holds a stake in the Russian mobile operator Megafon. It concluded that the fund's owners had engaged in money laundering on behalf of the true beneficiary of the fund. One of these owners was Leonid Reiman, the Russian Minister of Communications and associates of President Putin, hailing from St. Petersburg. The real principal of IPOC, Danish lawyer Jeffrey Galmond, possesses Telecominvest, Interregional Transitelecom, and 50% ownership of the Sky Link mobile operator (Ermolin 2011). In November 2007, the British Virgin Islands Attorney's Office requested assistance from US authorities to check Reiman's alleged involvement in illicit activities. Nevertheless, all Ministers keep on holding his position without repercussions (Tikhomirov 2022).

There remain numerous unsettling questions surrounding Putin and his inner circle. Who are the actual co-owners of all of these holdings and companies? Is it possible European and American businessmen have seized a significant portion of Russia's wealth without sharing it with higher management? Where do the substantial funds generated from arms exports ultimately go?

Furthermore, is the media's information about the Kremlin's alleged "black box office" accurate? This purported system involves undisclosed circulation of cash of unknown origin, potentially amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars, which may be used to facilitate the voting process. It is not surprising that experts and political analysts compete in estimating Putin's personal fortune, with figures ranging from \$20 billion to \$30 billion or more (Ermolin 2011).

The authoritarian and corrupt regime that has emerged in Russia under Vladimir Putin's rule poses a significant threat to the country's future. The government has much at stake. The reemergence of a free media and political competition in Russia would immediately expose the illicit activities of the current Russian leaders. If this were to happen, they would, at best, risk

losing their positions and the lucrative opportunities for making billions. At worst, it could result in the loss of freedom altogether. The misappropriation of state assets, particularly within Gazprom, and the utilization of foreign intermediaries to import oil at reduced value, a practice now attributed to Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who is currently imprisoned, have become widespread among many of "Putin's friends," albeit on a much larger scale.

Russia has achieved unparalleled expertise in applying the jurisdiction selectively to benefit the interests of those in power. The courts turned out to be completely subordinated to the executive power, the consideration of cases acquired the character of a massive violation of the rights of citizens. Russia won a dubious lead in citizens' appeals to the Strasbourg Court of Human Rights. More than a fifth of all appeals to this court came from Russia, while the state has lost more than 90% of cases to citizens (Chernozub 2018).

The Yukos case stands as a prime example of lawlessness prevailing in Russia, where the courts were manipulated to seize assets in favor of Putin's group. This case gave rise to a distinct form of justice known as the "Basmanny" system, named after the Basmanny court notorious for its disregard for the rule of law and subservience to the executive branch, particularly evident in the rulings related to Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and Platon Lebedev. Once the ownership of Yukos assets changed hands, previous court decisions regarding the collection of Yukos' alleged "tax debts" were swiftly overturned. When Rosneft gained control of Yukos' primary asset, Yuganskneftegaz, the tax claims against the company miraculously vanished as the courts invalidated them. In February 2005, the Federal Arbitration Court of the Moscow District reversed its earlier decision to recover a tax debt of over 9 billion rubles from Yuganskneftegaz for the year 1999 (Belton 2020).

Before that, while still a subsidiary of Yukos, Yuganskneftegaz had already lost. The Court in Arbitration nullified the Ministry of Finance demands for additional taxation of approximately 5.6 billion rubles for the years 1999-2001, and so forth. The Yukos case unleashed what became known as the notorious "tax terror" – a widespread and arbitrary practice of imposing additional taxes on enterprises based on the whims of the tax authorities. Companies were compelled to pay not just what was required by law, but whatever amount the authorities calculated based on their own criteria, and the courts, in most cases, ruled in favor of the tax authorities. The principle of the presumption of the rightness of the taxpayer, enshrined in the Tax Code, was in fact replaced by the principle of the presumption of his guilt. It has become

almost impossible to conduct a normal business without illegal tax extortions in Russia. Tax terrorism is widely used as a club to take property from "outsiders" and redistribute it in favor of "their own" - this is done at all levels of society (Miller 2018).

This system hampers the growth of business within the country, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises that lack the resources to “surprise” officials and judges. It is driving the nation towards a complete dominance of monopolies, where criminal enterprises and corrupt officials form alliances. Oleg Shvartsman, an entrepreneur involved in Kremlin business ventures, described in a November 2007 interview with “Kommersant” (newspaper) how this system of "state racketeering" operates, whereby property is seized from entrepreneurs in favor of entities connected to government officials. Shvartsman's story is a very accurate picture of the violence against the law for the redistribution of property that has become ubiquitous in Putin's Russia. Putin's system is Shvartsman's system. Among the assets that have come under administrative and judicial pressure from the state racketeering system is by no means only Yukos. These are Sakhalin-2, RussNeft, Nortgas, Tambeyneftegaz, Kovykta gas field, United Machine-Building Plants, Domodedovo airport - the list goes on (Shvarzman 2007).

4.3 Polarized Society

Masking its own stupidity, contrary to logic and common sense, the USSR for seven decades demonstrated classic pre-logical thinking - it created imaginary enemies who carry out the orders of "determined villages". Instead of dealing with the causes of the troubles, poorly educated party-chekist functionaries were looking for "disruptors". Even today, the descendants of the Soviet people's commissars already talk about the tricks of the enemies, which, they say, caused gigantic fires in Transbaikalia and Khakassia.

The Ukrainian north-eastern neighbor lived and continues to live not according to international norms and laws, but according to its own rules and regulations, because "the brain swells." For example, Vitaly Churkin and Sergey Lavrov regularly demonstrate their logical thinking to the civilized world - modern classics of scandalous Moscow diplomacy. What can we say about the smaller Kremlin elite, if Vladimir Putin himself is not all right with logic. Thus, on March 18, 2015, Vladimir Putin stated: "We have always thought that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, and I think so now." (Zygar 2016) Pyotr Stolypin, who is highly respected in today's Russia, did not think so. In his circular dated January 20, 1910, he classified the Ukrainian people as foreigners, that is, he recognized that Ukrainians are not Russians (Zygar 2016). Therefore, one can only advise Putin to "carefully study motherhood" - history. First, it is Russian history.

A distinctive feature of the cult of Putin's personality is that the structure of this phenomenon is seen as supplemented by another component - a model mirrored to the structure of the accepted model. That is, mimesis in the direction of imitation of the image of the leader by the masses in the personality cult of the modern Russian Federation is not canceled but is accompanied by a much more intensive penetration of the image of Putin himself into all social spheres, whether real or virtual, verbal or visual. The actual formation of the image of the cult of the person takes place according to the scheme of superimposition, combining the images of the father, God, the tsar and Putin (Zygar 2016).

5. Geopolitics. Chapter 3: Global world order

5.1 Europe

Putin's anti-Western policy, which aligns with Russia's strategic interests in its present historical phase, primarily aims to undermine the European integration project. This objective serves as a significant hurdle for Russia, which aspires to revive its imperial aspirations.

It is evident that Putin's regime cannot be characterized as liberal, and under the influence of a fundamentalist shift and authoritarian self-isolation, the Russian economy, culture, and national identity will struggle to remain competitive. This means that a successful European Union will isolate Putin's Russia from the west just as Chinese expansion will isolate it from the east. Therefore, the need for such a transit formation will disappear to the extent that modern technologies and the general logic of globalization will allow Europe and Asia to enter direct interaction.

In addition, the European alternative will inevitably destroy any alliances imposed by Putin on his post-Soviet vassals, and will also undermine his regime from the inside, as it will offer the Russians themselves the values that they gave up in favor of the consolidation of the regime - the values of freedom and development. In other words, the success of the EU will inevitably marginalize Russia and negate the chances of success of its own integration project on the territory of the former USSR. Therefore, there cannot be a stable model of equal partnership between the EU and the conditional "Russian Union" in principle.

Destroying the European integration project, turning the EU into an ineffective institution, preventing the formation of European geopolitical subjectivity is a strategic, vital task for imperial Russia (Liik 2022).

The goal of the Kremlin's policy towards the EU countries is:

- rejection of the idea of European unity and a return to the state when each European country builds its relations with Russia independently.
- a return to "pragmatism" in bilateral relations, when the interests of practical benefit (for an individual country, a specific company, personally - for a European official) are recognized as higher than principles, norms and values.
- recognition of Russia as a "guarantor" of stability and security in Europe.

- refusal of the expansion of the EU in the post-Soviet space, recognition of the zone of special interests of Russia in the eastern part of Europe, as well as in the Baltic and Black Sea regions and in the Balkans.
- refusal of the strategic partnership with the USA, including the curtailment of cooperation within the framework of NATO (Affairs 2018).

The Russian Federation aims to achieve several objectives by actively influencing the social and political landscape in Europe. Firstly, it seeks to undermine the unity of the anti-Russian sanctions policy. Secondly, by maintaining tensions in specific regions, particularly Eastern Europe, Russia aims to enhance its own significance and convey the message that global and European security cannot be achieved without its involvement. Thirdly, by supporting separatist movements within the European Union (EU), Russia aims to establish precedents that may eventually lead to the recognition of Crimea's annexation. This strategy also aims to divert the attention of European countries towards stabilizing their internal socio-political situations, thus reducing the priority of containing Russia in their policies.

Russia also actively uses the existing contradictions that arise between the EU and the USA the decrease in the coherence of their foreign policies. It is not by chance that one of the conflicting issues of these relations has become the issue of sanctions pressure on Russia. Germany's recent calls for the United States to coordinate its sanctions policy with the European Union, particularly with Germany, have been strongly worded. This is because uncoordinated US sanctions have a negative impact on the interests of European companies. Taking advantage of Germany and France's desire to assume a leading role in European politics and assert their independence from the US, the Kremlin is leveraging these factors to pursue its foreign policy objectives towards the European Union.

In order to advance its foreign policy goals in relation to the European Union, Russia is capitalizing on the US's implementation of unpopular foreign policy measures in Asia. These measures have contributed to the emergence of threats to European security. Some of these steps by the US include recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, interfering in the internal affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran during periods of social unrest, prioritizing US state interests over international security issues, undermining the authority of the United Nations as a supranational institution for regulating international relations, and making harsh statements against states that do not align with US foreign policy preferences.

5.2 China

It is characteristic that Russia and China are active participants in various interstate dialogue structures operating in the Asia-Pacific region: the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Security Issues (ARF), the East Asia Summit (VAS), and have partner status in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The interaction between the Russian Federation and China within the framework of these international organizations is manifested in a rather constructive approach: on the one hand, Moscow supports Chinese initiatives, and on the other hand, Beijing promotes Russian integration into regional cooperation mechanisms.

However, of course, in the membership of these international institutions, the parties, first, pursue their own interests. Moscow is characterized by:

- the desire to increase its influence on the processes taking place in East and South-East Asia.
- to integrate into the existing and emerging security structures in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to emphasize its presence in the region.
- strengthen authority among the countries of the region. At the same time, by participating in these regional integration entities, Beijing is trying to reduce the level of anxiety of neighboring states regarding the growth of its military power, as well as to reduce the influence of the USA in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is interesting that China and Russia are the first member states of the nuclear club and permanent members of the UN Security Council, which joined the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2003 and 2004, respectively (Gabuev 2023) .

However, Moscow and Beijing are not equal players in the regional subsystem of relations. Therefore, if China is an undisputed contender for leadership in the Asia-Pacific region, then Russia at this stage of development does not possess a significant set of resources for the realization of its own national interests at the regional level, but it strives in every way to secure the status of a "great Pacific power". In this light, the deepening of cooperation with China greatly contributes to the achievement of this goal. In view of the growth of its own opportunities to influence global and regional processes, the Celestial Empire, in turn,

considers close interaction with the Russian Federation as a tool for strengthening its position in the region. It should be noted that both states do not have allies with significant potential both at the global and regional levels, which serves as an additional incentive for the development of bilateral relations. Since there is a difference between the parties in the parameters of power and the degree of inclusion in various regional integration processes, it will be logical to note the different positions in the Pacific hierarchy of states, which is accordingly reflected in the features of national strategies of regional behavior (Hass 2023).

As the Chinese expert Feng Shaolei observes, the shift of the center of economic and political activity to the Asia-Pacific region creates new opportunities to challenge the strategic partnership of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, and at the same time forces these states to make large-scale adjustments to their foreign policy strategies (Shaolei 2017). The classic Chinese novel "The Three Kingdoms" begins as follows: "the world, divided, reunites, and reunited, divided." From China's point of view, everything is cyclical and has a deadline. This also applies to Beijing's perception of the current transformation of the world order - the bloody breakdown of the global system is a terrible phenomenon that brings great calamities to people, but it is inevitable. At the same time, in the future, if there is a multipolar world that crystallizes after chaos, Beijing prefers to occupy one of the key places - China aspires to become the geo-economic center of the planet and to have a global political influence equal to that of the United States. Despite the prematureness of the fateful moment, he is ready for it politically and economically.

First, during his reign, the head of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping and his entourage created an ideological and historical foundation for the "national revival of China" - the actual return of the status of the Chinese Empire; This ideology consolidated Chinese society as much as possible around the Leninist-Marxist Communist Party of China (CPC) - now the power and authority of the party is undeniable. The leadership of the People's Republic of China managed to form a regional and international support group for Beijing among loyal countries (Bokova 2022)

Second, China has become a manufacturing and financial giant with a resilient and flexible economy ready for outward expansion. For starters, Beijing wants to establish the yuan as the currency of international settlement instead of, or alongside, the dollar, allowing it to grow at the expense of capital exports. In the future, China hopes to actively develop cooperation with

the countries of Eurasia, Africa and South America, including them in its economic complex. After all, Beijing is investing in science, building its own technological base, which is still inferior to the American one in terms of quality, but is gradually closing the gap and can become China's mainstay in the event of the loss of American technology (Hass 2023).

BRICS is a tool of China's struggle against the United States

All this may explain why China geo-strategically supports Moscow by buying its resources. Beijing aims to significantly weaken the leading position of the US and establish a multipolar world, if it fails to establish a monopoly on the new order. For Beijing, the Russian Federation acts as a client state that, at its own expense, commissions international architecture, clearing the space for the establishment of a new world structure that is more beneficial to China. Therefore, and this should be understood, for the Chinese authorities, Russia is a situational ally, not an equal partner. The game is currently at high stakes. And the stakes are too high for China: if Moscow now falls economically and capitulates to Washington, and the Putin regime collapses, Beijing risks being left strategically alone with the United States in East Asia, where the United States has already created a powerful anti-China coalition. What's more, the collective West - NATO and the European Union - will oppose China. It is not for nothing that for the first time in the strategy of the alliance, the activities of the People's Republic of China are called a systemic challenge (Kausikan, et al. 2023). Let me remind you that Washington has openly identified China as "the greatest threat to world order." In addition, China considers today's good relations with the Russian Federation an important civilizational asset that weakens the West. After all, the Chinese see the confrontation between the Russian Federation and the USA as a "conflict within the West", and not as a confrontation between the West and the East. That is, Beijing, by buying Moscow's loyalty, prevents potential American-Russian cooperation that will be directed against it, and guarantees temporary security for itself on its northern border.

Russia publicly admits that it is China that will be the economic leader of the planet and is actively opening for cooperation. Now Beijing can buy almost anything it wants from the Russian Federation. Both countries have partially switched to trading in yuan, and Moscow also uses the Chinese currency for commercial transactions with India. Beijing gained significant access to Russian minerals, transit facilities, and the market. This is an important step towards the future of Chinese economic leadership, where Moscow has consciously

accepted a modest role as a regional center focused only on the "global south". And all this in order to weaken the leadership position of the USA (Kausikan, et al. 2023).

The apparent Achilles heel of the Chinese economic model is its dependence on resource imports. For example, Beijing is 72% dependent on foreign oil, and it imports 19 out of 42 non-carbon elements for its production. That is why China gladly began to purchase Russian oil, gas and coal, which Western consumers are gradually abandoning due to sanctions. Especially since Moscow sells carbohydrates to Beijing at a 20% discount. During the first hundred days of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, China purchased almost \$13 billion worth of Russian energy sources, becoming their largest buyer. This year's rapid increase in the number of oil tankers to China from the Russian Federation - their number has almost doubled in the first six months of 2022, Russian-Chinese trade increased by a quarter compared to last year and amounted to almost \$78 billion. Exports from the Russian Federation increased by 50%, twice exceeding imports from China, amounting to approximately \$50 billion. Energy carriers became the lion's share of Russian exports, but grain supplies also increased dramatically - 12 times, as well as beef supplies - twice. In 2022, Moscow and Beijing expect that their trade will exceed \$200 billion. The Russian Federation will finally become the main supplier of oil to China, trading with it in a surplus for itself (Kausikan, et al. 2023).

China may also be helping Moscow re-export resources. For example, Beijing in the first half of 2022 suddenly increased the sale of palladium by a hundred times - 5.2 thousand ounces against 55 ounces in 2021. Note: China is an outright net importer, not an exporter, of palladium. At the same time, the Russian Nor Nickel, the largest producer in the Russian Federation, experienced logistical problems due to sanctions, so in theory it could cooperate with Chinese partners regarding transit assistance (Kausikan, et al. 2023).

Beijing is cautiously capturing the Russian market. This opens opportunities for Chinese companies of the second and third echelons, which, unlike transnational giants such as Huawei or Geely, are not afraid to fall under secondary Western sanctions. Such Chinese car manufacturers as JAC Motors and Great Wall Motors have announced that they are staying in the Russian Federation and will also expand their activities there - they want to occupy the niches left after the departure of Western corporations. The same applies to manufacturers of smartphones and electronics in general. Little-known but breakthrough Chinese brands

Realme, TECNO, Infinix and iTel, together with Xiaomi and Huawei, plan to capture 90% of the Russian market (Prokopenko 2023).

Through the common Sino-Russian border, the flow of construction equipment from China, tires, car spare parts, etc. has increased. Only through the Manchuria checkpoint, the flow of Chinese special equipment to the Russian Federation has increased by 47.4% over the past five months, reaching 4,084 units. Moscow and Beijing finally opened a joint bridge across the Amur River in the city of Blagoveshchensk. So far, only trucks drive on it.

Beijing is also interested in the Russian services market. Legal companies from China and Hong Kong, such as Zhong Yin, LT Lawyers and CFN Lawyers plan to open in the Russian Federation. China cooperates with the Russian Federation, saves it from economic collapse not because it is pro-Russian, but because it currently meets its national interests against the background of geopolitical confrontation with the USA. Beijing, supporting Moscow, is raising the stakes in relations with Washington, trying to restart the bilateral dialogue on favorable terms. If the United States makes concessions to China, then the Sino-Russian rapprochement will cool down, and the "Putin-Xi Consensus" will become history, as will the "great friendship of Stalin-Mao." However, now, Washington is not going to give in to Beijing, because the global world order is at stake (Prokopenko 2023).

5.3 America

The core of Russia's new geopolitics, according to the logic of imperial revenge, should be relations with the United States of America. At the same time, the relations between Russia and the USA in their current phase also have a significant imitative component. It would be logical to predict that behind the initiative to tighten relations with the USA is the desire of the Russian leadership to influence American policy, to change it in a direction that would be favorable for the realization of Russian interests. But there is no such intention, just as there is no such state of American policy that would satisfy Russia more than its current state (more precisely, the state for 2013).

This is evidenced by the ideas of theorists of Russian imperial revenge (O. Dugin, E. Fedorov, V. Karyakin, V. Korovin, etc.), completely detached from the realities of the modern world. In their texts, the USA is seen as a demonic power that seeks to single-handedly rule the world

and form a world government. At the same time, it is emphasized that in the conditions of a unipolar world under the supremacy of the USA, Russia will be assigned a secondary role, and its sphere of influence will be insignificant, which will not allow the Russian Federation to become an empire. That is why, in particular, O. Dugin declares the task of establishing a "multipolar world" and reducing the limits of US influence to "as small as possible" (Tolstoy and McCaffray 2015).

The struggle against a unipolar world dominated by the US forms the basis of Putin's anti-Western rhetoric. In his Munich speech, he stated that "in the modern world, a unipolar model of the world is not only unacceptable, but also impossible in general" (Volker and Fried 2022). One could agree with this thesis, but with the clarification that the world order, against which the Russian leader demonstratively fights, exists only in his imagination and in the propaganda stamps of the Russian mass media.

America, due to several internal reasons and the specifics of the current stage of globalization, is objectively freeing up space for the "multipolarity" of the modern world, the emergence of new centers of gravity and variability of political, economic, and cultural structures. It does not need to be forced to do this, it is possible to use ready-made lacunae in the world system, filling them either with chaos or with one's own presence. The appearance of these gaps is one of the main incentives for Russia's imperial revenge, China's creeping expansion, Turkey's growing ambitions, Iran's return to the geopolitical game, etc. At the same time, the US is a convenient target for simulated aggression by new players, just as an aging champion is the most desirable opponent for a young contender.

Geopolitical sparring with the USA is extremely useful for Russia from the image and tactical side. It automatically strengthens the subjectivity and status of the Russian Federation in international politics, corresponds to the greatest extent to the internal essence of the Putin regime, and allows realizing its own interests in many issues that are important for Russia. First, Russia gains additional weight in an insufficiently equal partnership with China. Secondly, it is no longer a raw material addition to the EU undergoing a "democratic transit" but is turning into a geopolitical or civilizational alternative almost equivalent to American influence. At least such a transformation is taking place in the minds of the Russians themselves and their followers in Europe. Thirdly, Russia becomes a partner or unofficial leader of any forces opposing America and its globalization project. This gives Putin the opportunity to find

"friends" in the person of the leaders of Iran and Turkey, to arouse sympathy in Latin America and to receive practical benefits from all this.

Fourthly, the development of the Russian military-industrial complex and the latest technologies in the military sphere give a sense of the security of the regime, its importance and influence in a world in which the risks of armed conflicts are growing sharply (Gvozdev 2023).

In fact, Putin does not seek from the USA any other policy in the world in general and in relation to Russia in particular. He needs a change in the modality of American policy towards Russia and its leadership. He wants Russia and him personally to be "respected". That is, his goals lie in the symbolic plane, and the actions he expects from the US leadership should also be symbolic in nature. There is no doubt that he needs this mainly for internal use in Russian and post-Soviet politics, but at the same time he needs demonstrative American concessions to formalize his "win" in issues of world politics that are strategically important for Russia.

In order to have the necessary trump cards for bargaining with the Americans, Putin and his team decided to gain certain leverage to influence the situation in the United States from within. The democratic model of management allows for such an intervention, although it does not guarantee its success. Signs of a "symmetric response" to American technologies for destabilizing authoritarian regimes can be seen in some attempts by Russian special services to provoke the growth of internal contradictions in American society. In part, this intention is carried out with the help of traditional propaganda tools known since the time of the USSR (coverage of Trump's "migration" initiatives, exaggeration of the situation surrounding racial discrimination, support for marginal political and social groups, support for terrorist attacks is not excluded). But more "creative" approaches are also used in Moscow's current hybrid arsenal - for example, the opening of a representative office of the organization "Independent California" in Moscow, the purpose of which is to prepare a referendum on the withdrawal of the state of California from the United States (Stent 2020).

However, Russian cyberattacks on the servers of the US Democratic Party gained the greatest resonance. Analysts claim that Russian special services are behind groups of cybercriminals. Of course, the Russian Federation denies any connection with the perpetrators. In particular, the pro-Kremlin mass media spread information that the NKDP server was hacked by a Romanian hacker who promised to publish the information in WikiLeaks (Collier 2023).

Tactics of geopolitical bluffing and playing the "offended" game cannot bring success indefinitely. Therefore, the Kremlin, preparing for Clinton's possible presidency, could place certain hopes on Trump's coming to power in America as an unprepared player with whom it will be possible to start a new party on more favorable negotiating positions. The calculation was that in this new game, Putin would be able to convert the successes of the previous period into political capital, which would be fixed by a new "gentleman's agreement" on the distribution of spheres of interests and roles in the modern world. For this, it was necessary to maintain a high level of presence in key areas of the simulated confrontation in order to finish the game with the maximum result. Such zones are relations with China, relations with NATO in Europe, relations with Iran, as well as conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. These trends convince Putin's regime that Russia is conducting its foreign policy in the right direction, and its methods are effective despite widespread international condemnation and pressure. In this regard, the leadership of the Russian Federation does not consider it necessary to revise its foreign policy and make any concessions. A decrease in tension in relations between the USA and the Russian Federation is likely after the global world economy emerges from a state of crisis and the redistribution of spheres of geopolitical influence, primarily in the USA-China-EU-Russia quadrangle. The future distribution of geopolitical forces on the world stage will depend on the ability of the parties to implement foreign and military-political goals in accordance with the existing potentials of national power and the balancing of strategic collective interests within the current and new alliances and coalitions (Gvozdev 2023).

The last bastion of Russian geopolitical influence is nuclear weapons. And it is precisely the presence of such a dangerous field for a potential conflict between the United States and Russia that forces the White House to treat Putin as cautiously as possible. However, at the same time, the general attitude of not succumbing to blackmail and finding out the real capabilities of a partner is also evident in this area for American politics.

6. Results

A political regime refers to the set of institutions, structures, and rules that determine how political power is acquired, exercised, and transferred in a particular country or political system. It encompasses the overall form of government and the mechanisms through which it operates. Political regimes can be classified into different types based on the nature of power distribution and the degree of openness and accountability. Some common regime types include democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, monarchy, and oligarchy.

1. **Democracy:** A democratic system is characterized by the active involvement of citizens in the process of making decisions, either directly or through elected representatives. It is based on principles such as the recognition of political diversity, the conduct of open and equitable elections, the safeguarding of individual rights and freedoms, and adherence to the rule of law.
2. **Authoritarianism:** In an authoritarian regime, power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small group, who exercise significant control over political institutions and limit political freedoms. Authoritarian regimes often lack mechanisms for open political competition and citizen participation.
3. **Totalitarianism:** Totalitarian regimes are characterized by absolute control of the government over all aspects of public and private life. They suppress dissent, restrict individual freedoms, and aim to shape and control all aspects of society, including the economy, culture, and ideology.
4. **Monarchy:** A monarchy is a political regime where a single individual, usually a hereditary monarch, holds the highest authority. Monarchies can vary in their degree of power, ranging from absolute monarchies where the monarch has unlimited power to constitutional monarchies where the monarch's powers are limited by a constitution and democratic institutions.
5. **Oligarchy:** An oligarchy is a regime where a small group of individuals, often from a wealthy or influential elite, hold political power and exercise control over key decision-making processes. Oligarchies can exist within different types of political systems, such as democracies or authoritarian regimes (Siaroff 2013).

It's important to note that political regimes can evolve or transition over time due to various factors, including social movements, revolutions, constitutional changes, or external pressures.

The specific characteristics and dynamics of a political regime depend on the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic context of the country or political system in question (Siaroff 2013).

What is ideology? According to the Oxford dictionary meaning, Ideology refers to a set of ideas, beliefs, values, or principles that form the basis of a political, social, or economic system. It is a comprehensive framework that guides and shapes the way individuals and societies perceive the world, interpret events, and make decisions (Dictionary n.d.).

Ideologies encompass a wide range of areas, including politics, economics, social issues, morality, religion, and culture. They often propose a vision of how society should be organized, what principles should govern human interactions, and what goals should be pursued.

Ideologies can be influential in shaping individuals' political affiliations, as well as the policies and actions of governments and political movements. They can advocate for different systems of governance (e.g., democracy, socialism, or fascism), economic models (e.g., capitalism, socialism, or mixed economy), and social values (e.g., individualism, collectivism, or religious conservatism). Some prominent ideologies include liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, anarchism, feminism, environmentalism, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism. Each ideology has its own unique set of principles, goals, and approaches to social and political issues. It's important to recognize that ideologies can vary in their interpretations and applications, and individuals within a particular ideology may hold different views on specific issues. Moreover, ideologies can evolve over time, responding to societal changes and new challenges. While ideologies can provide a sense of purpose and direction, they can also lead to political polarization and conflicts when differing ideologies clash. Therefore, understanding the underlying ideologies behind political movements and policies is crucial for comprehending and analyzing societal dynamics.

6.1 Historical Reference

The formation of "Putinism" began in the 1990s. The economic model of the regime was formed under the influence of neoliberal economists and conservative officials associated with state corporations. The former stood at the origins of Putin's anti-social economic policy, the latter ensured the dominance of the bureaucracy in the economy, an authoritarian political model. The ideological basis of "Putinism" appeared much later than the formation of the

system of power. In In 2000, the New York Times journalist W. Safire (1929–2009; USA) was one of the first to use the term "Putinism" in relation to President V. Putin to denote a personality cult, censorship, and militarism. In the Russian Federation, the political scientist A. Piontkovskyi introduced the concept of "Putinism" into everyday use, using it in his publications (Pyontkovsky 2013)

6.2 Characteristic

The "Putinism" regime is characterized by a regressive (past-oriented) type of policy that relies on forceful methods of achieving goals.

Tools for asserting and strengthening the "Putinism" regime:

- influence and arbitrariness of special services, power structures from the presidential administration.
- narrowing of competition in politics and mass communications: control of the opposition (see Political opposition), introduction of censorship, repression against political opponents of the regime.
- administrative resource, massive falsifications in the election process.
- ostentatious and controlled referendums and sociological surveys.
- aggressive state propaganda, elimination of independent mass media (in the press freedom index, the Russian Federation fell from 121st place in 2002 to 155th place in 2022 out of 180 countries) (RSF 2023).
- active use of the Russian Orthodox Church as a means of geopolitical influence of the regime.
- forming the image of an external enemy and waging aggressive wars, which should divert attention from internal problems.
- the quasi-ideology of racism with its inherent ideas of Russian neo-imperialism, chauvinism, Orthodoxy, mythologizing the past and nostalgia for the Soviet era.

6.3 Political and Ideological Sphere

Characteristic features of the regime in the political and ideological sphere:

- strong presidential power that is not under the control of society, the cult of an authoritarian ruler, the creation of conditions for preserving his powers (amendments

to the constitution of the Russian Federation were approved in 2020, which allow V. Putin to be re-elected to the post of president twice more since their adoption).

- a combination of rational-legal (preserving the institution of elections), traditional (actual continuity in the transfer of presidential power) and charismatic (the image of a "strong leader" with demonstrated mass support) legitimacy of the president.
- non-observance of the principle of separation of powers (i.e., "sovereign democracy"), actual control by the higher legislative and judicial executive powers.
- a weak technical government, which has no political weight, is not responsible for its actions before the voters.
- judicial arbitrariness (denying the force of law and asserting the right of force); subjective and selective application of the law.
- A formal political system that allows for the existence of multiple political parties, but where one party, often referred to as the "ruling party" or "United Russia," holds a dominant position.
- imitative character of the systemic "opposition"; repression against political opponents.
- use of eclectic symbols — symbols of Orthodoxy, communist symbols of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Latin letters "Z" and "V", etc.
- elements of nepotism.

6.4 Foreign Policy Sphere

Characteristic features of the regime in the foreign policy sphere:

- aggressive foreign policy (energy resources are used as weapons — "pipeline diplomacy", "gas blackmail").
- a strict line of behavior in relations with the United States of America, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO bloc), and the countries of Western Europe.
- Foreign policy sphere
- Characteristic features of the regime in the foreign policy sphere:
- aggressive foreign policy (energy resources are used as weapons — "pipeline diplomacy", "gas blackmail").
- a strict line of behavior in relations with the United States of America, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO bloc), and the countries of Western Europe.

- Russian imperialism, the new bipolarity of the world, the new confrontation between East and West (Russian and Western civilization).
- denial of Western liberal-democratic values and institutions, intolerance to cultural elements of other nations, to which Eurasian (Russian) civilization is opposed.
- nuclear blackmail aimed at intimidating the world community.
- support for anti-democratic, dictatorial, anti-people and terrorist regimes, support for separatists (see Separatism) and the creation of quasi-states on the territories of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine.

6.5 Economic Sphere

Characteristic features of the regime in the economic sphere:

- the formation of a state monopolized economy (state oligarchy), which is under the control of the authorities.
- dominance in the most important sectors of the economy by corporations that are under the direct control of the state bureaucracy: Gazprom, Rosneft (Russian: Rosneft), Transnafta (Russian: Transneft), Russian Railways (Russian Railways), etc.
- total subjugation of all the country's wealth by the criminal oligarchy.
- systemic corruption.
- relatively liberal, but non-transparent financial and tax policy.

6.6 Social Sphere

Characteristic features of the regime in the social sphere:

- lack of welfare state.
- contempt for the individual, the desire to dissolve the individual in the "majority" and suppress the "minority".
- reduction of opportunities for civil society and at the same time preservation of certain freedoms in the press and the Internet (creating the external impression that "Putinism" is not a dictatorship).
- the desire to control one's own population and totally manipulate it (control over the vertical and horizontal mobility of citizens).

- complete dependence of official trade unions on the state, imitative nature of their activities.
- prohibition of unauthorized protest actions, in particular individual picketing (see Picketing).
- deep rootedness of elements of the Soviet mentality in public consciousness.
- the use of "newspeak" - a set of euphemisms to mask / veil reality: "special operation" instead of "war", "bang" instead of "explosion", "de-escalation" and "dramatic reduction of the offensive" instead of "retreat", "negative information" instead of "losses", "hard landing" instead of "air crash", "information filtering" instead of "censorship".

Referring to the methodological experiment above, we can state that the hypothesis 1 is the accurate answer that passes to our research question: Putinism is the main political regime in the Russian Federation. It is characterized, identified and enrooted in to all political, economic and social spheres.

6.7 Consequences of the "Putinism" Regime

In the political sphere, the formation of an authoritarian system based on the cult of the personality of the leader, the influence of power structures and de facto one-party system.

In the foreign policy sphere, there is an aggressive expansionist policy (support and resolution of military conflicts in Georgia, Syria, Ukraine) and the escalation of confrontation with Western countries to the level of a new "cold war". In the economic sphere — the formation of a state monopolized economy, weak small and medium-sized businesses; high income gap between the richest and poorest citizens of the Russian Federation; banking dependence on foreign currency. In the social sphere, there is a weak, small middle class; "brain drain" from the country; lawless position of hired workers; corrupt and ineffective education, health care system.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Key Findings

Putin's regime is founded on the revival of the Soviet imperial model, which encompassed a hierarchical administrative system, an exaggerated role of power institutions, societal militarization, reliance on revenue from natural resources, a paternalistic society, and a self-isolating ideology driven by information control. These elements have been systematically replicated in Russia under Putin's leadership. However, the regime has achieved effectiveness by operating on a smaller scale and shedding some costly functions.

In my master thesis, I evaluated on the new phenomenon of 21st century that is called Putinism. At the beginning stage of writing my master work, I formulated the strong purposes and objectives of the paper, which I met fully during my research. Furthermore, the hypothesizes were successfully examined and the hypothesis 1 is proved during the comparative study analysis. Literature review helped to demonstrate the argumentation.

Putin's Russia essentially resembles the Soviet Union, with the key difference being the allocation of resources to a smaller state entity and the maintenance of a reduced set of functions. This streamlining of needs has allowed the regime to restore the functionality of the system, resulting in the perception of a "successful Putin." After conducting research, the author concludes that the first hypothesis, suggesting the restoration of USSR attributes, accurately explains Putin's project.

Nevertheless, the paradox lies in the fact that these attributes, essential to Putin's project, are detrimental to Russian statehood itself. They undermine the positive effects of the "reduced USSR" approach and hinder the country's opportunities for renewal and progress.

7.2 The Future of Russian Federation

Threats of internal destabilization of the regime and the loss of its supply legitimacy are growing. The risk factors are the internal conflict of the Russian elite, the ethnic and confessional heterogeneity of the population of the region, the shortfall of the resource base of the main groups of beneficiaries of ceremonial politics, critical dependence of large social groups on financing their vital needs from the state (regional and local) budget. All this leads

to the fact that in the event of the appearance of signs of a crisis, the collapse of the social and management system of the Russian Federation can be extremely rapid and large-scale.

The crisis detonator can be:

- unprepared departure from power for Vladimir Putin.
- transition to dictatorship (Putin's status improved in various modifications).
- internal conflict (siloviki, "chekists", "liberals" or so).
- the emergence of a strong political alternative (for example, Russian nationalists).
- escalation of conflicts on the territory of Russia and on the borders.
- a sharp deterioration in the social and economic situation.
- external military defeat or real isolation.

At the same time, the cause of the crisis for the regime could be, if it were, disrupted the balance of interests in Putin's estrangement. At the same time, the cause of the crisis for the regime could be, if it were, disrupted the balance of interests in Putin's estrangement. At the time of the current deterioration of the social and economic situation in the country, to save the Putin's government and consolidate the growth of the growth of the emergence of new lines of tension in the support of that government, that are still remaining at the latent station.

The biggest immovable and standing behind the line is the center - the region:

- to strengthen the egoism of the regions, in order to deprive the regional elites of the donor republics of the financial resource from the powerful viceroy.
- awakening on the basis of Tatar and Bashkir nationalism, expanding ideas about Siberian autonomy.
- the growth of China's contribution to the economy of the Siberian regions, Japan and the Republic of Korea to the far-flung Pacific regions.
- the loss of the resource to the ninth ceramics of the Pivnich-Caucasian republics, the increase of the Wahhabist influx in Chechnya and Dagestan, the expansion of this influx in other regions.

- on the rise of protest moods and manifestations of regional separatism in the leading positions of the extreme nationalist organizations, the expansion of the ideas of Russian fundamentalism.
- the crisis of sovereignty and imperial identity, which is to blame for these minds, will speed up the process of the flow of population from distant regions (let's say - from the national republics and districts) from the center and to Moscow.
- the improvement of infrastructure and logistics in the borders of the Russian Federation is becoming a major necessity, and the function is to move from the center to the regions (it will not work from the outside help).
- the old ones among the subjects of the Federation no longer correspond to the realities of Russian life, also known as the subjects' initiating changes to the Constitution of the Russian Federation.
- on this basis the political conflict is blamed, which develops into a large-scale confrontation of "all against all".

The Russian model practically does not have internal reserves of stability. That's why she saves her life, especially in a friendly, friendly environment. At the same time, the exhaustion of the trust resource of the West and the neutralization of the effect of unpredictability in the actions of the Kremlin increases the dependence of Russian policy on external factors. Putin's regime is transforming into a handcuff of the heavenly rocks, which killed the crisis of the current light system, and now, first, it's clear the reactions of the main global gravity, and in another way – to lie down in a critical manner in order to destroy the light system from the point of bifurcation.

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