THE RUSSIAN POLITICAL CULTURE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21TH CENTURY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Political culture is an essential part of national culture in a broad meaning of the last term.[1] It is definitely true for Russia with its unique national culture, —of course, if one agrees that a national culture is a society's customary way of life, comprising both accepted modes of thought and belief, patterns of conduct, and a cultural heritage (knowledge, arts, morals, etcetera.).

People like Europe for its ethnic and spiritual diversity. Within a few hours after Berlin you are in Luxemburg, Brussels, or any other spot —village, old town —with very different culture, habits of citizens, etcetera. But Russia is not Europe, Russia is like the US— one have to take a plane to the other side of the country, but the culture and habits of majority, the ethnic Russians, remains more or less the same. Geographically Russia occupies a large part of Europe and a huge part of Asia. Such a vast and multiethnic country, of course, has certain 'Oriental features' in the mentality of nations composing the general population of entire state. No doubts, local cultures depend upon geographic peculiarities, local history and the ethnic

[1] The discussion of this point is presented in the author's *Introduction* of the collective book devoted to a comparison of political cultures (Rukavishnikov *et al*., 2007, in Russian).

composition of local population[2]. But the mass political culture looks more or less the same everywhere despite peculiarities of local national cultures. Opinion polls proof this thesis.

Political scientists across the world debate whether contemporary Russia is a democratic country or not. Some say, "No, yet…", other, "Yes, but…". Though the word *democracy* is still bandied about, the main issue of debates is geopolitical influence and western deterrence of a resurgent Russia. However, this chapter is not about the mentioned debates. We are focusing basically on changes and continuities of political culture of post-Soviet Russia.

It is well-known that culture's traits are relatively persistent through time although they do undergo radical changes, especially in the 20th century. In the 20th century, Russia went through two socio-political revolutions (the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and the anti-communist upheaval in 1991), two world wars, and the Cold war with the West, which reflected in rapid and radical changes in the societal way of life as a whole. However, today we cannot speak about the break with the past culture total. No matter how radical and innovative a recent socio-political shift (the 1991 anti-communist upheaval) was —the national cultural ethos lingers on in many ways, and more persistently in some areas of life than in others. This helps to explain why Russia's contemporary political culture has many elements of the pre-1991 and even pre-1917 past, and is similar to political cultures of developing nations more than to that of advanced democracies (Rukavishnikov, 2007).

This chapter shows the links between Putin's politics and the Russian mass political culture of nowadays. As Robert Tucker noted, "political culture is everything in culture that pertains to government and politics. In Soviet Russia, little does not so pertain" (Tucker, 1987, vii). If one agrees that a society's political system is embedded in political culture, then he or she may question how the post Soviet, i.e. post-communist, political system shows itself in contemporary society's pattern of orientations towards democracy and private economy, and how the present day, socio-economic reality, provides the subjective orientation to politics and government, etcetera. We agree fundamentally with those who argue that in the beginning of the 21st century it is no longer possible to separate Russia's internal matters and external relations, that Russia's domestic and foreign policy is a subject

[2] Alas, we have no space to discuss geographic peculiarities of local national cultures of the Russian Federation.

to dispute, and that Russia's political scene has been dominated by Vladimir Putin since 2000. But the chapter is not about Putin's politics but about the popular perception of him as a national leader and a popular support of his policy. It is for the reader to judge how helpful these discussions have been in interpreting the present-day Russian political culture.

II. Culture, political culture, continuities and changes

There are many interpretations of political culture as a specific cultural phenomenon in scientific literature. We have no chance to consider all of them, because of no room. As to political regimes, the regimes can be named as authoritarian, totalitarian, democratic, transitional, or some other sort. And these attributes are descriptors of political cultures as well. As to association with the so-called regional civilization dominants, the political cultures may be Euro-Atlantic or Western that includes Northern American, Northern European, etcetera. They can be also Islamic that includes Arabic Islamic, or Oriental that includes Indo-Buddhist, Confucian, etcetera., or Latin American, or African (differentiated as to sub-regions and countries) and so on.

Political cultures and/or subcultures can be classified according to various criteria. The most widely known is the typology suggested by G. A. Almond and S. Verba in the early sixties (Almond, Verba, 1965), the application of which to the case of young post-Soviet Russia is discussed below.

The research methodology always depends on the task of the study, or on what must be achieved. We believe that all approaches to exploring and comparing of political cultures are not mutually excluding, but, on the contrary, mutually contributing. This is why we find artificial opposing various approaches, such as socio-cultural and civilization's, value-oriented (so-called Weberian, positivist, behavioral) or statistical, and phenomenological (constructivist) as is common with some authors.

No type description fully reveals the richness of the content of political culture —this very capacious category of social sciences' vocabulary—, which is due to the natural lack of clarity, as concerns the descriptions of political cultures, in any language spoken today and in the way this term is used.

What is really important to discuss is the attempts to explain the difference between the Russian culture and European ones, made by anthropologists at some or other time, by referring to the "quality of human material"

or, in other words, the specifics a national character or ethno-psychological qualities of peoples.

From our point of view, such an attempt is ridicules. The ethnic Russians share the same basic values as other humans. Mentally the ethnic Russians are like Europeans. These facts do not contradict to the theory of 'cultural stereotypes'. Not each of those, who laugh at funny anecdotes about the ethnic Russians or/and dislike the Russian domestic or foreign policy, can be labelled Russophobe! Yes, stereotypes shape popular attitudes to the Russians as a nation and to the Russian state, no doubt, but —together with media and other factors.

According to the opinion shared by cultural anthropologists, the Russian national culture is, practically, the complete opposite of the typical European or North American ones. While Russians are explicit *collectivists*, most Europeans, if one believes psychological tests, are mostly *individualists in character*.

Individualistic cultures, according to admires of this opinion, promote the self-realization of their every member, while in collectivistic cultures (mostly Oriental), the Russian culture being one of them, group objectives have priority over individual ones (Ester *et al*., 1993). That is why Western Europeans and North Americans greatly appreciate personal liberties and rights, very persistent achieving their goals (mostly individual ones) yet, at the same time, tolerant, socially united, law-abiding, and not too ambitious[3].

Although there are certain historic grounds for such a generalization, here we tread on rather unsure ground[4]. It is true that *collectivism* has grown up in Russia's villages through centuries with an active assistance of the Russian Orthodox Church; and that it became a principal feature of national mentality by the beginning of 20th century. The role of Orthodox Church in forming Russia's national culture should not be underestimated. It is important factor of politics till nowadays.[5]

[3] Usually, Western cultures are described as individualistic and Asian - mostly as collectivistic ones. Prof. Kenneth Janda, the prominent American political scientist, has noted in a private communication to the author, 'the Americans are even more individualists than Europeans'. Perhaps, he is right because he knows the Americans and Europeans from inside.

[4] Estonian scholars showed the total absent of so-called 'Russian psychological uniqueness' in terms of basic human values as reported by BBC (BBC *Russian. com*, 18 July 2008).

[5] Russia is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country. However, the unity of the Orthodox Church with the state was a symbol of the tsarist epoch. The church-state collaboration was not visible during the early Soviet period because of atheist attitudes and politics of Bolsheviks. Since the 1991 upheaval the post-Soviet authorities are moving to a closer

During the Soviet time collectivistic mentality justified the elimination of capitalist's and private property of means of production, natural resources and land for sake of a top and total justice. All agree that Russians won over a significant number of enemies in various wars because of collectivism as the national character feature. And that an ideology of Bolshevism exploited collectivism as a foundation of domestic propaganda appealing to the unity of personality and community, the superiority of state's interest over personal needs and values, to scarifying interests of personality for the sake of the nation, for the communist victory in the whole world, etcetera.

However, the attempt of post-Soviet leadership to exploit inherited collectivistic feelings again is not very successful so far. Urbanized and educated modern Russia is no more a peasant country. Like the Russian Empire of the 19th century. The contemporary social and economic reality in Russia is very different from that in the Soviet period and the first post-Soviet decade.

One may add that traditionally in collectivist societies the state is strong, while the society is weak, not speaking about underdeveloped civil society and public opinion. Media is controlled by the powerful cliques. Segments of ruling class are fighting against each other for control over property and access to power in different forms. The centralization of power is fantastic, and the central power overwhelmingly dominates over regional (provincial) powers. Therefore the national leader (i.e. tsar, prime-minister, general secretary of the ruling party, president of state, etcetera.) always has enormous private power.

Yet there is no obligation to make a derivation from this general description of collectivist societies/states, one can easy finds analogies with Russia. There is no surprise that Russia's regime has certain 'Oriental' traits, and because of these traits the present-day Kremlin leaders looks like Russian rulers of previous epochs. And, perhaps, it would not be an oversimplification to say that the Russian leadership 'wields power in order to wield power' like in the past. Today Dmitry Medvedev, the third president of Russia, and Vladimir Putin, the former second president, currently prime-minister, who had created so-called the 'vertical of power' by naming governors of provinces, heads of regional police departments, and so on,

connection with the Orthodox Church, despite the declaration of the secular character of the Russian democratic state.

stick with the well-known 'imperial' path.[6] But the challenges of modernity, the global economic recession, put change on Russia's agenda, although no one can definitely say what direction it will take.

Here we must make a remark: the Western analysts often forget where the new post-Soviet Russian society had come from; that for over 700 years Russia had a leader either a tsar or a communist dictator. Political scientists should be very carious in defining the political culture on an anthropological-historical basis. References to psychology and history may explain a lot of things but not all of them. Even agreeing with everything stated above, it is still impossible to explain by the particulars of the Russian national character and history, why, say, the Finnish economy, once not so globally competitive as ten years later, so successfully and quickly overcame the economic decline following the collapse of the USSR and, early in this century, got the highest World Bank's ranking, while a resurgent post-soviet Russia even now is still behind world's leaders economically[7]. 'There are plenty of definitions of culture, but too little theory', —we have to agree with this conclusion, drawn many decades ago, but still vital today.

Today villagers form only about a third of the entire population of this vast state. The mentality of entire nation has changed in the 20th century, especially after 1917 and 1991. But many western sociologists and historians still draw the interpretation of discrepancy between post-Soviet Russia, post-communist Eastern Europe and the West from the Russian past, from the historical heritage of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.[8] They are emphasizing the difference between the nature of European feudalism and the Russian version of feudalism, pointing out that the selfdom system was banned in Russia only in 1861 when other great powers

[6] Of course, the reader may say, there is a small difference between these two leaders: if Vladimir Putin saw himself as an efficient "decider", as the CEO of the huge corporation named 'Russia', President Medvedev is proving the public with something else. Although he never talks about the sharp break with his predecessor's policies, Medvedev is giving clear signs that he is willing to lead the nation to the brighter future reinforcing the legal system and modernizing the political system, yet not radically.

[7] Economists believe that the principal reason of Finland's economic success was the skillful distribution of budget surplus. The Finnish governments managed, accumulating enough money, to prepare the country for increased spending due to globalization and the overall aging of the population. Additional means necessary for social security programs, larger retirement payments and the support of the healthcare system were found either. In our view, such an explanation is narrow, and the full scheme must include also political factors.

[8] The review of mountains of literature devoted to Putin's policy, contemporary Russia and post-communist transformations in Eastern Europe is out of our task in this article.

were in a phase of industrial revolution, that country's modernization under Stalin was overtaking, forced and cruel. Speaking about the political conduct of the present-day Russian Federation leadership, they put a finger on the leaders of October (1917) socialist revolution and the consequent civil war, remember Stalin's repressions in 1930s, the tragedies of the World War II and the following Cold War, the failure of Afghan war, and the lost of a fight against American imperialism in a global scale in 1980s, the break of Berlin's Wall and the collapse of the USSR under Gorbachev in 1991, and so on. These are plenty of fair connotations. But do they help to explain the reality?

All mentioned historically rooted characteristics of culture may be well attributed to the prerevolutionary tsarist Russian Empire, the Soviet Union as an ideological *state*, or the so-called 'Soviet Empire', and also to the post-Soviet Russia-the state, which is exposing itself as *emerging democracy*. But the question inevitably arises, why did political culture of old prerevolutionary and Soviet Russia must repeat itself, in part at least?[9] Cultural patterns do not repeat themselves in the present simply because they existed in the past.

The impact of changed life circumstances on political culture cannot be ruled out. The influence of the establishment of a new political regime either. The outcome of anti-communist upheaval of 1991 was a radical change of the social structure of the Russian society. Social strata on the top of the social ladder gained from the unfair privatization in the nineties, during the Yeltsin reign,[10] while the rest of population (i.e. the working class, intellectuals and pensioners) struggled for survival. Herein lays one of the reasons for an income gap between elites (with the 'New Russians' as a core) and the rest of society, which ends in a great discrepancy between a traditional world-vision of poor majority and a western-like conscious-

[9] The question is occasionally discussed on the plane of explanation of these connotations, but we have no room for an overview of conflicting points of view.

[10] The new 'masters of life' is a product of the transition from socialism to capitalism carried out under Yeltsin. The core of business' elite (or the newly emerged class of entrepreneurs, new Russian bourgeoisie) originates for the third time in the history of Russia (first time the strata of entrepreneurs emerged under Peter the Great in 17th. century; the second appearance of the capitalist business elite was under Lenin and his collaborates in early twenties —mid twenties as a result of the NEP— New Economic Policy. In post-Soviet Russia was no repetition of the Stalin's 'elimination of the bourgeoisie as a class" that had happened in late 1920-early 1930s).

ness of rich minority[11]. Doesn't it mean the essence of the Russian national character is gradually changing?

Under Putin the second circle of re-sharing of the former state and public property occurred, but again the majority of population was a loser. Therefore it is important to separate the impact of the remote and recent past on a political conduct and consciousness of different layers of the business elite.

Putin's closest lieutenants are now occupying top positions of most state-controlled economic giants, such as 'Gasprom', 'Rosneft', 'Russian railways';[12] the 'bloody oligarchies', born in Yeltsin's time and flourished during Putin's reign, under Medvedev have received a huge governmental financial support when the economic crisis came, and again at the expense of masses, —the critics of government say—And then add: that is why the ruling regime is concerned, first of all, about its own safekeeping, and that is why the 'masters of life' often write off genuine national interests.

The middle class in the social structure of post-Soviet Russian society is not large as in the western capitalist societies if ever exists as a social unit; there is no reason to speak about a specific value set of this emerging class or to consider this social unit as an influential political force so far. The emerging middle-class had not benefited from the Russian macro-economic growth during the Putin reign to the degree that many western commentators believed it deserved to.

By same token, the bureaucratic corruption in Russia, which is named as a principal goal for the government and society to fight against nowadays, has its root in the feudal past of the nation. At the tsarist time it was a phenomenon attributed to the nobility, the elite's culture. The great majority believed that it is wrong for government officials to accept bribes, but the government officials habitually took bribes. Nothing has radically changed till nowadays in this particular regard.

To recap in brief: the ethno-psychological characteristics of peoples formed over centuries, and the national characters will not become much different in foreseeable future. These features are said to be responsible mainly for continuities, not changes in culture. Most likely cumulative effects of the political and cultural factors along with a joint impact of the national

[11] According to the official statistical information, the present deciles' ratio overall the country is about 17 (in Moscow-city–over 41). 'The reported income inequality is a product of a so-called 'Latin-American model of development of inequality' that exists in the Russian Federation', - say some analysts. We have no room to discuss this point.

[12] Today Putin's entourage controls leading companies with total capitalization equal to 80% of Russia's stock market (Satter, 2007).

economic and political history are responsible for past and the present and unlikely for upcoming changes in politics, economics and, finally, culture.

III. The disillusioned society

All the modern capitalist countries are *democracies*, at least as their state structures go. However, democracies differ. In this connection, we should note that the post-Soviet Russia and many other developing nations are similar as to their ages. They are young. Yet the contents of young democracies are different from either older democracies or from each other. The specifics of each nation are determined by national culture, history and the present global competitiveness, economic and military might. In this regard post-Soviet Russia differs from other post-communist states of Eastern Europe and the CIS. Psychologically and culturally Russians are a bit different either; they more materialistic than their western neighbors since the very beginning of post-communist transition (Simon, 1993). The Russian Federation is an advanced economy. Russia is the permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and the member of G-8 and G-20. Because a role of energy resources in world politics has dramatically changed, Russia with its huge oil and gas deposits got a title of "energy superpower of the 21st century". Russia's military might is based on strategic nuclear forces equal to the US ones. A country with these attributes cannot but is a global player with strategic heft. And it is hard to believe, that in the nineties, after the collapse of the great USSR, the world history was written without Russia.

During the nineties post-Soviet Russia was a young pseudo-democracy with formally guaranteed human rights and democratic liberties. However, we would like to describe Russia in nineties as 'anocracy'. *Anocracy* is a general term for a state with weak (or non-existent) central authority; this kind of state might easily fall into civil war, because the integrity of the country is likely to be imperilled by regional separatists. Its pattern of political system is a mixture of democratic and autocratic elements. The balance of these elements is unstable.

In our view the bloody Chechen wars and the deepest economic decline were the most direct proofs that Russia under Yeltsin represented a special sort of anocracy. Anocracy means a weak governability of a vast territory. By the end of Yeltsin's reign governability became a real sharp issue. Perhaps, it was the problem Number One. There is no such a problem today thanks to Mister Putin.

According to opinion polls, since late nineties, the word 'democracy' is associated in the minds of the Russian general public with mass poverty and misery, unfair privatization of public assets and personal troubles as an aftermath of the liberalization of economy.

For many Russians Boris Yeltsin, the first post-Soviet Russia's president, and his team of reformers are personally responsible for the devaluation of democracy in Russia more than others. And for a poor international standing of the former great power either. It is a commonly accepted fact that Russia's foreign policy in nineties could not be labelled independent, despite the special relations between President Yeltsin personally and his western counterparts, including the US President Bill Clinton.

Yeltsin's personal behaviour at home and abroad was perceived by most Russians as disgraceful. He had a stable reputation of drunker. One may remind that once Yeltsin, being drunk, could not go out of the plane in Ireland's airport; once being drunk he tried to conduct the military orchestra in Germany, etc. Almost everybody in the country was happy to get rid of this sick man by the end of 1999. Although critics may say the transfer of power from Yeltsin to his successors had not been performed according to democratic norms, despite the fact that Mr. Putin as Yeltsin's protégé got an overwhelming support of voters.

Under Vladimir Putin Russia became a *quasi-democracy*. The strengthening of state —or of his personal power— became the central theme of the first Putin term. But since foreign affairs could not be ignored, Putin's emphasis on the fight against Chechen separatists and international terrorism provided a convenient formula for melding the domestic and the foreign into a basic theme in a dialog with Western leaders. This theme after the September 11 tragedy in the USA became dominant. The accent on terrorism as a common threat helped both sides to smooth the criticism of the western media concerning the process of reduction of democracy in Russia. As we know, Putin was easily re-elected in 2004. During his second term the russian president reinforced the priority placed on domestic affairs; and the view of foreign policy as an extension of domestic politics had the side effect of further deterioration of relations with the West (Rukavishnikov, 2007).

We do not share the viewpoint that in early 2000s Russia has developed the 'specific variant of democracy (so called 'sovereign democracy')'. Such a viewpoint was presented in 2006 by the Kremlin high-rank officials (Vladislav Surkov and his associates) who applied the false idea of so-called 'sovereign democracy' for justification of Putin's attitude towards the criti-

cism from abroad concerning violations of human rights in this country and for strengthening national identity.

This viewpoint refers to the above mentioned principle of superiority of state over personality and society. We do agree that this false idea served an ideological basis of official propaganda of the Soviet era, but, in our view, this principle is not valid today. And that the move from the 'Russian version of anocracy' to the so-called 'soft variant of personality cult' of the president Putin occurred during the period of his reign. The balance of elements of the political culture shifted towards the authoritarian pole.

Today there is a new and unique form of political regime (*tandemocracy),* which came after Yeltsin's anocracy in the nineties and Putin's quasi-democratic authoritarianism of early 2000s.[13] But the essence of the political regime in Russia has not changed. And we do not foresee a radical change in the upcoming future. Because the contemporary Russian Federation remains a semi-democratic state in which elections and other democratic institutions formally exist, but actually a weak parliamentary political opposition is unable to seriously affect the policies of the ruling regime.

Indeed, there is no serious political challenge to the governmental domestic politics at home (say, Putin's will, if you wish). The constructive-critical ideas of communists and novel ideas of democrats are quickly get co-opted by the mainstream liberals and conservatives, i.e. "the United Russia", the power party. There is no strong political opposition in the parliament, because even the Communist Party fraction is too weak. The tiny non-parliament extremist parties and interest groups from both the left and the right flanges of political spectrum have no popular support. The pro-western parties tend to disappear or to drastically change what they advocate.[14]

The electorate is alienated from power. According to the available data, in 2002 in Russia, only small minority felt they have free elections (15%).[15]

[13] The word "tandemocracy" is derived not from "democracy" but from "tandem" as in a bicycle for two. As the reader may know the back rider on this kind of bike smells the T-shirt of the pilot and must pedal, following his orders. It is an ironic definition of the current power-sharing arrangement between Putin and Medvedev used by the Russian social scholars. Most agree that, despite the constitutional right of the president to dismiss the prime minister, Putin (the pilot) appears to remain the more influential figure in this political combination.

[14] We are talking here about the newly emerged right-wing democratic political party which has replaced the former 'Union of Right Forces' party.

[15] In Eastern Europe, only in the Czech Republic in 2002 did a majority (58%) say they have honest, multiparty elections. Source: The Pew Global Attitudes Project, the "Views of a Changing World", *Report*, June 2003.

For sure, the transition of power from the incumbent president to the next one in 2012 will be again a formal procedure (i.e. an imitation of election) like it was done in two previous cases, when a 'dark horse' Putin succeeded Boris Yeltsin in 2000 and then when a 'dark horse' Medvedev replaced Putin in 2008.[16]

All in all it looks like a 'theater-state democracy' as —some western analysts say—. Russia has no democracy of western style. The political reality in the West is so different from that in the Russian Federation in many dimensions that it is fair to say: in total, a political Russia does not match with a western standard of democracy.

"But…, who cares? Who gives a flying fuck?[17] Russia goes along its own track of development" —say the Russian state officials in response—.

The liberal-wing of politicians and political scientists in this country prefers to position contemporary Russia as "Emerging Democracy". Indeed, Russia had only about 20 years since the failure of Gorbachev-initiated socialist reconstruction (so-called 'perestroika and glasnost') to develop itself from a totalitarian system to democratic one. And therefore the system of checks and balances in this relatively young system, as well as a spread of democratic values among the Russian population, are not yet deep or strong as in old mature western democracies.

That is why the "Russian Glass of Democracy" is only half full, not half empty, from historical perspective. It sounds promising. Will you, dear reader, agree with it?

Those, who buy this positioning, must agree, that it is possible to restore economy without creating the full-scale western-style democracy. Perhaps, they'll put a finger on communist China where is no western-style democ-

[16] Meeting with foreign members at the annual Valdai Discussion Group in mid- September 2009, the Russian Prime Minister was asked a direct question about his political future and the country's next presidential election in 2012. Putin replied, "My term expired and I thought Medvedev was the best person to replace me and I backed him […] In 2012, we will think together and will take into account the realities of the time, our personal plans, the political landscape and the United Russia party and we will make the decision." All elections are about both ideology and competence. The Russian case proves no exception. Pragmatic Putin said no words about ideology. It seems he doesn't care how to persuade voters, or about maintaining of a reputation of honest and competent leader. Speaking to foreign journalists, he simply added: "My friend Tony Blair in England also forwarded his authority to Gordon Brawn, his closest associate. Who cares there about democracy, elections, competitors, etc?" (Source: Author's compilation of media reports).

[17] Dear Editor! Feel free to delete this phrase! If you wish.

racy but are high rates of economic development.[18] This argument rises up many questions: Is Russia a part of Europe both culturally and politically, despite a fact that a larger part of this country is located in Asia, or may-be Russia is a unique civilization, serving as a bridge between the East and West? Will Russia belong to the family of democratic nations ever in the future? When will Moscow finally get rid of ambitions to head the world, to be 'Third Rome', or to be the great 'pole' in the multi-polar world of the 21st century? These geopolitically relevant issues are out of this paper, and we'll not tackle them.[19]

In Europe where the economic well-being is high, confidence in democracy is higher as well. We will not quote the results of many public opinion polls showing that, for the most part, the populations of developed Western countries believe that democratic values are the most natural characteristics of the societies they live in and show dissatisfaction with democratic institutions only in connection with some particular cases and mostly isolated scandals. On the contrary, in most newly independent countries on the territory of the former USSR, including Russia, there is no way to talk about the massive support of the principles of democracy. People everywhere are united by their desire for honest multiparty elections, freedom of speech and religion and an impartial judiciary. A fair judiciary is seen as especially important; in most countries it is more highly valued than free elections. Yet in the CIS there is a widespread sense that these democratic aspirations are not being fulfilled. As we said above, Russia is in this list either.

[18] As is known, market economy may successfully develop *without real democracy*. Moreover, there is an opinion that there being a developed democracy is not a *necessary* and *universal* condition of fast economic growth. The followers of this viewpoint most often refer to modern communist China, the "young tigers" of Southeast Asia, whose impressive success was achieved under essentially totalitarian regimes, and India, whose democracy's attributes and outward appearances are not unlike those of the West, which is the limit of the similarity. They say that in transitional and developing countries political stability so necessary for fast economic growth is far more assured by the growing wealth and strength of the states than by what their citizens think about democratic values. In the meantime, saying that, they ignore the fact that today the least global economic competitive are countries with not very democratic regimes and where poverty and corruption are rampant.

[19] Since 19th century the discussion around these questions was characterized as a debate between so-called 'Westernizers' and 'Slavofiles' or —in the contemporary discourse inside the intellectual elite— between the so-called 'Atlantists' and 'Eurasianists'. Understanding that these are more value matters, than empirical issues, the discussants come to very different answers and visions of Russia's future.

Table 1

The attitudes of Russian citizens towards the principles of democracy and the assessment of their practical application, 2002, % of population

Country	Deem necessary….[1)]	Believe that exist….[2)]
Honest elections		
Russia	37	15
Fair judicial and legislative systems		
Russia	68	20
The freedom of the press		
Russia	31	14
Freedom of speech		
Russia	30	20
Civilian control over the military		
Russia	20	12
Religious freedom		
Russia	35	35

Note: 1) The question was put approximately the following way: 'Is it very important… not at all important for you to live in the country where (an item on the list) exists? We show the percentage of those who answered 'very important' ('want it'). 2) The question was put about the following way: 'Do you believe that (an item on the list) works very well?' We show the percentage of those who answered 'works very well' ('have it').

Source: The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *"Views of a Changing World" Report*, June 2003. The Pew Center. *The People & The Press, Report 2003*, pp. 52, 58, 62, 63. The representative national poll was held in July 2002. There were 1002 respondents in Russia.

Table 1 shows how attitudes concerning democracy and practical application of democratic principles were spread in Russia in 2002. These numbers speak for themselves. We could say they serve for our assessment of the present-day culture, constituting the umbrella under which we have to operate.

What is democratic governance for the Russians? According to numerous opinion surveys, majorities in all western-style democracies, said it is important to live in a country that is governed democratically —and even emphasized, this is very important. In Russia the picture is opposite: in May 2009 only 16% said it is "very important", 46% said "somewhat important", 19% said "not very important", and 7% said "not at all important" .[20]

[20] The above reported data were extracted from the report of World Public Opinion organization (*http://www.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/report09.pdf)*.This institution conducted the world-

Relatively moderate enthusiasm concerning democratic governance could be seen in the other post-Soviet states (for instance, in Ukraine at the time of polling the numbers saying "it is very important" were just 36 %).

In spring 2009 respondents were asked, "How important do you think it is for people to be free to express unpopular political views, without fear of being harassed or punished —very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important—?" In Russia, a second share of those interviewed (39%) said such freedom is *very important*, and a majority of 47% said it is *somewhat important* ("not very important" 8%, "not at all important" 4%, "don't know" 2%)[21]. But when asked how free they think people *actually* are to express unpopular views in their country, without fear of being harassed or punished, the picture changed: a majority of people in Russia say they are not completely free ("completely free" -9%, "somewhat free" 40%, "not very free" 39%).[22]

People who support greater political tolerance are also more apt to support democracy. This statistical law was drawn in the mature democracies. Is it true for Russia? Let us take a look on data.

According to the Pew reports, in 2005 by an overwhelming 81%-14% margin, Russians say, *a strong economy is more important than a good democracy*. Most of respondents preferred the leader with an 'iron hand' (Table 2). The desire for a healthy economy is strong and consistent across all segments of Russian society —men and women, young and old, and every socioeconomic subgroup agree that—, if forced to choose, they would pick prosperity over democracy (Table 3).

wide poll of 21,285 respondents in 24 nations that comprise 64 % of the world's population. Not all questions were asked in all nations. The margins of error range from +/-2 to 4 percentage points. The surveys were conducted across the different nations between April 4 and June 30, 2009; the poll in Russia was conducted between 22 and 26 of May, 2009 by the Levada Center.

21 *Ibidem*.

22 *Ibidem*. Longstanding democracies may also have a higher baseline of expectations and may thus be more acutely aware of how liberal ideals are not entirely fulfilled in practice. Fairly small numbers say that society is completely free in the US (24%), Britain (21%) or France (17%).

Table 2

Best Kind of Governance for Russia?*

	Democratic Government, %	Strong Leader, %	Don't know,%
Spring 2005	28	66	6=100
Summer 2002	31	70	9=100
1991	51	39	10=100

*Note: Respondents were asked whether Russia should rely on a democratic form of government to solve the country's problems or a leader with a strong hand. Source: Pew Research Center. "*Russia's Weakened Democratic Embrace Prosperity Tops Political Reform*". Report released: 01.05.06

Table 3

Democratic Government vs. Strong Leader,
% Favor Democracy over Strong Leader

Total	1991, %	2002,%	2005,%
Men	51	21	28
Women	58	21	30
"Revolutionary generation"			
18-34	58		
29-45	--	23	
32-48	--	--	29

Note: The "revolutionary generation" is composed of Russians who were ages 18-34 in 1991, the year of the USSR's collapse. Source: The Pew Research Center. "*Russia's Weakened Democratic Embrace Prosperity Tops Political Reform*", Report, 2006. Released: 01.05.06.

Commentary: In 2005 the decline in enthusiasm for Russian democracy had been particularly steep among men. Even in 1991, when support for democracy was relatively high, a significant gender gap existed on the question of whether democracy or a strong leader could solve the country's problems–men overwhelmingly chose a democratic government (58%- 35%), while women favored democracy by only a narrow four-point margin (46%-42%). Fourteen years later, that gap had virtually disappeared. In 2005, equal proportions of men (66%) and women (65%) thought the country should rely on a leader with a strong hand. Notably, the initial passion for democracy had declined sharply among those who were young when the Soviet Union collapsed. In 2005, as this "revolutionary generation" of Russians approaches or progresses through middle-age, the post-communist era had eroded their youthful enthusiasm: now those who favored a strong leader outnumbered the fans of democracy by a 66%-29% margin. (Rephrased from the Pew Report "*Russia's Weakened Democratic Embrace Prosperity Tops Political Reform*". 2006)

In our opinion, the disillusionment with democracy may be tied to the country's inability to meet high expectations created in the wake of the Soviet regime's collapse. The split of society emerged in early 1990s (Rukavishnikov, 1994). By the beginning of the 21st century the Russian society was divided in two almost equal parts concerning political changes after 1991; this cleavage was deeper than in Eastern European societies (Table 4). We believe mass' alienation from politics and power by 2010 became stronger than it was in the nineties and at the edge of the 21st century.

Table 4

Approval of Post-Communist Political Changes in Eastern Europe, 2002, %

Country	*Disapprove*	*Approve*
Czech Republic	15	83
Slovak Republic	29	69
Poland	30	62
Ukraine	49	50
Bulgaria	48	49
RUSSIA	45	47

Note: Bulgaria, Poland and the Czech Republic asked about political changes "since 1989". Russia and Ukraine asked "since 1991".

Source: The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *"Views of a Changing World"*. Report, June 2003

Opinion polls showed that the two decades of post-Soviet experience stripped most Russians who supported the democratic reforms of the late eighties-early nineties of their illusions. For the most part, the Russians now believe that, whatever the political system, regular people shall never have any impact on governmental policies and shall forever be poor, while the tremendous gap between the rich and the poor is hardly compensated by a chance to vote. In the present days of global economic recession the feeling of nostalgia for the 'good old Soviet times' has twisted into a feeling of indifference towards politics and political participation. In tough conditions of nowadays the bulk of plain people in my country do not care much about democracy.

Considering that after the collapse of the communist regime in Russia the concepts of market economy and democracy began to be perceived as closely interconnected, it is no wonder that democracy is blamed for the country's post-Soviet sores by all who think that the slogan "a strong leader

and market without democracy" will help to enhance the living standards and increase the country's economic power, who believe that there being incorruptible judicial system and law enforcement is more important than respect for democratic liberties and principles[23].

IV. Russia's political subcultures

Political culture ad hoc is traditionally viewed as a system of values, attitudes and believes, such as ideology or faiths, all individuals adopt and share while becoming society members, especially during the period of socializing, basically at high school. It is continuously corrected by the permanently changing conditions of life. This brings us to the next step: evaluating of the composition of political culture, to the quantative estimates of shares of various political subcultures among Russia's population based on surveys' data.

Almond and Verba distinguished the parochial, the subject, and the civic and participant types of political subcultures, which might be assembled in two groups of so-called "active" and "passive" subcultures according to individual's self-orientation toward a political action[24].

We have applied this typology to a transitional Russia of early nineties. Hereby are the estimates of proportions : the share of 'parochial' subculture 9%; "subject" 5%; "civic" 2%; "participant" 5%; "others" 79%[25].

In our then opinion, this scheme was a bad description of Russia's reality of that time. Therefore we shifted to the typology proposed by Dutch scholars Felix Hunks and Franz Hikspoors (Heunks & Hikspoors, 1995). They had slightly modified the aforementioned typology proposed by Almond and Verba about 50 years ago. The Dutchmen added a "civic participant" type, a "protest" type, a "client" type, the "autonomous" type and several "spectator" types in addition to four mentioned above subcultures.

[23] We believe that this group should include the followers of the so-called "controllable democracy", in which a formally existing political opposition is unable to seriously affect the policies of the ruling regime while democratic institutions of power are obedient to the president or the ruling clique and subservient to the bureaucracy and oligarchy. These people are reluctant in giving up their ideas.

[24] The entire approach was politically and ideologically biased (Oren, 2000).

[25] Data concerning the Russian political subcultures of mid -nineties were published in Russian (Rukavishnikov et al, 1998); this finding was never published in any foreign language , yet reported at the international conference in Hungary in 2000 (Rukavishnikov, 2000).

The definition of each type of political subculture is a specific combination of orientations. The definition of "civic participant culture" includes both trust in civil servants and much political interest, together with readiness for action. Opposing this well-integrated activism is "protest type" of disintegrated activism. The new passive type is the "spectator culture", differing from the parochial and subject cultures by at least some political interest "combined with the smallest orientation on participation in collective actions and minimal trust in institutions" (Heunks, Hikspoors, 1995, p.73). The "autonomous" type is characterized by distrust in civil servants, some political interest and self-orientation on action. It is a form of active culture.

The "spectator" type had been appeared to be a most widespread political subculture in then transitional Russia —over a half of population (56%). Taken together three passive types represented among the 70 % of the total adult population (spectator 56% + parochial 9% + subject 5%). It was the plurality of nation. The "autonomous" type represented among over one fifth of the population (22%), while all other active culture's types —only among 8% ("civic" 2% + "civic-participant" 1% + "client" 0% + "protest" 0%). The "protest" and "client" types actually were absent. In total active types represented among 30 %. Thus, the group of passive subtypes of mass political culture was dominant in transitional Russia of the nineties co-existing with the other lesser spread group of active subtypes.

The estimated proportions of subcultures, in our opinion, are valid nowadays; of course, they are changing with time, though very slowly, —we quote no today's figures because of a lack of relevant data. We do believe that today the largest segment of nation is characterized by the domination of the so-called "passive" types of political subcultures too, so we will not risk presuming when the balance may noticeably shift towards "active" types in the coming future.

To recap: Russia is a split society in regard to government and politics; there are certain discrepancies between Europe and Russia in terms of basic political orientations and political behaviour of mass, which we had found a decade ago (Ester et al., 1997).They are not fundamental, but stable, yet, perhaps, temporal. May be in the upcoming future the discrepancy between political values shared in the West and the East will disappeared, and then political scientists and sociologists will not debate this issue.[26] The principal difference between post-Soviet Russia and the West is the opposite

[26] We are talking about traditional political values of western-style democracy such as the classical capitalism, private property, liberal ideology, civil rights, strikes, etcetera.

proportions of active and passive subcultures. Types of active political subcultures are over-represented among citizens of stable mature democracies, while in post-Soviet Russia, on the contrary, the bulk of plain people are politically passive.

V. About Putin's popularity

The national mentality and the historical past are said to be responsible mainly for continuities, not changes in an attitude towards politics. Historians say, Russians traditionally accept authoritarian leadership, and therefore there was no surprise that Putin as "the strong hand's leader" managed to induce Russia's power groups (business oligarchs, Moscow ministries, regional governors, media tycoons and so on) to fall in behind him. Indeed, it is easy to link Putin's politics with the national traditions formed through ages. But is it a perfect explanation of Putin's popularity at home?

For the bulk of ordinary people, Mr. Putin was the perfect symbol of Russia's resurgence[27]. Add to this the permanent impact of domestic media on mass consciousness in favour of Yeltsin's protégé. That was how the image of *national saviour* for Mr. Putin had been formed.

Since 2000 the national television channels feed their audiences with the idyllic pictures of Mr. Putin working hard as the president or at governmental meetings as the prime-minister or during trips abroad. His famous anti-American escapades had been met at home with great sympathy as symptoms of rebuilding of Russia's great power status; the popular support of his foreign policy's course was especially visible during the days of the Georgia-Russia military conflict in August 2008. Mainly this had happened because Putin appealed to deeply rooted attitudes of mistrust towards the West.

Now let us take a brief look on opinion poll's data. In late August 2009 the majority of Russians said, what he has done during 10 years in power is a realization of their hopes (Table 5). Russians supported tough military actions during the Russian-Georgian war in August of 2008; at that time the personal rating of Mr. Putin was over 80%, higher than a then rating of President Medvedev. Of course, the number of Putin's admirers is slowly diminishing during the present economic recession, but still is enormously big. The public at large hails Putin as prime minister and simultaneously blames his ministers. In the eyes of plain people, bureaucracy at all levels, not Putin personally, is

[27] Putin's youthful appearance, sobriety and intelligence were in a sharp contrast with characteristic features of his predecessor.

responsible for economic troubles emerged when the world crisis entered Russia. This sounds paradoxically, but polls' data confirm this observation[28].

Table 5

The popular views on Putin's ruling, 2009

Question: Could you say after 10 years that your hopes linked with Putin have been realized?	%
Definitely Yes/ more Yes	58
More No/ definitely No	24
I have and had no hopes	11
Hard to answer затрудняюсь ответить	7

Source: the Levada-Center poll, 28-31 august 2009. Solyanskaya, Ksenia (Солянская Ксения). "Putin has justified a half of hopes (Путин оправдал половину надежд)", *Gazeta. Ru*. 15.09.09 (*http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2009/09/15_a_3260899.shtml*, in Russian).

Vladimir Putin is often pictured by the western media as an increasingly hostile to democracy and to the West because of his words and actions. Such a portrait was created long before the August 2008 incident with Georgia. For instance, in May 27, 2007, the respected British newspaper *The Sunday Times* wrote: "to the West, Moscow's strongman is a despot out to crush democracy; that's just why most Russians like him". Such a description, in our view, was an oversimplification, but this kind of picturing of Russia's leader has been continued after the August 2008 occurrences[29]. In fact, such declarations verge on conscious misinformation or even defamation. In our opinion, to say that plain Russians like Putin, *because* of his anti-democratic domestic politics or because of his anti-Western escapades, is not correct. Such an interpretation is too simple to be a whole truth.

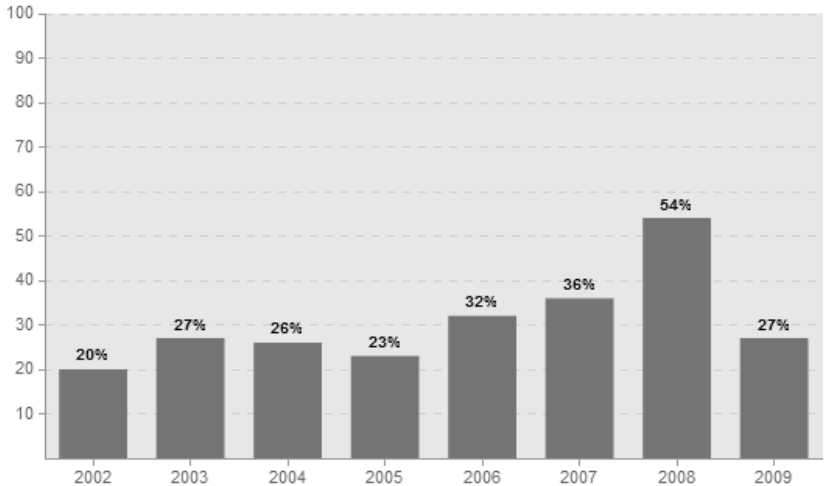
The share of Russians satisfied with country's direction during was relatively small during almost all years of his reign (fig 1). But by the end of his

[28] According to data of opinion poll conducted by the private polling firm, the Levada-Centre, in August 2009, the large percentage of Russians used to blame big government (a state), not Mr. Putin personally, for a lack of essential improvement in various fields: from housing, health service, social care to army, education and a fight against criminality and corruption (Sheiko, 2009).

[29] Hereby is an example: '….Just as Stalin sacrificed countless lives for the sake of Soviet expansion, so Putin is poised to make a similar sacrifice for the sake of Russian neo-imperialism —perhaps not on Stalin's scale, but likely in a way that will negatively affect Russia ns' lives' (Stromberg, 2008).

presidency the level of satisfaction with country's direction in Russia had grown up and was much higher than in most neighboring states[30].

Fig. 1 Satisfaction with Country's Direction among Russians.



Source: the Pew Research Centre database (*http://pewglobal.org/database/?indicator=3&country=181*).

Full question wording: Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

Note: Percent responding Satisfied, all years measured. Satisfied combines "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" responses. Dissatisfied combines "somewhat dissatisifed" and "very dissatisfied."

Table 6

Satisfaction with Country's Direction in Eastern Europe, % satisfied

Country	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*	*2009*
Bulgaria	4	-	-	-	-	9	-	-
Czech Republic	36	-	-	-	-	23	-	-
Poland	9	-	-	13	-	18	42	20
Russia	20	27	26	23	32	36	54	27

[30] Such opinions are classified as so called 'paternalist's attitudes', the heritage of the socialist past. It is often not fair, in our view, but we have no room to discuss the issue.

Country	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Slovakia	11	-	-	-	-	46	-	-
Ukraine	9	-	-	-	-	9	-	-

Note. Eastern Europe: Percent responding Satisfied, all years measured.
Source: the Pew Research Centre database (as cited above).

It is also absolutely true that Putin's vision of democracy in his own country differs from western understandings of the concept of democracy. And that the Russian mainstream press had forgotten the language of political discourse because his government had successfully actually controlled the national media without establishing a formal censorship. However, it is also true that appeals to restore 'real democracy', made by the right-wing pro-western politicians, found no response among the apathetic masses and had no chance of success. The right-wing forces lost their electorate, because too many voters associate their leaders with the economic hardships of the nineties. Therefore Putin's pressure on the right-wing forces and western-oriented liberal critics of his politics at home counted negative popular attitudes towards western politics and therefore was welcomed by masses.

The Left-wing forces (communist parties and alike) are weak and demoralized because the ruling party 'United Russia' now headed by Mr. Putin, successfully stole their social demands and patriotic slogans.[31] The rejection of opposition's appeals occurred regardless of the fact that the Putin team could not fight against the unfolding economic crisis as successfully as the communist China leaders did. But, please, dear reader, do not forget that Russian economy under Putin in early 2000s had started to resurge with the one of highest percentages of annual GDP growth in the world (about 5-7% per year before the beginning of the global financial crisis in 2008). Yet this fact can be explained by the flood of cheap oil money and other collateral circumstances, the public at large consider the national recovery as an advantage of Putin's politics.[32]

[31] The deliberation of public policy in the western-style democracies takes place within a realm of discourse. The Russian mass is not involved in policy evaluations on ideological grounds, because the Kremlin wants to avoid conflicts within a society. We are not calculating so-called 'talks on private kitchens' on policy-relevant issues over which there is continuing disagreement.

[32] According to data of opinion poll conducted by the Levada- Centre in August 2009, most Russians (52%) are sure that the growth of well-being before the crisis of 2008 must be attributed to advantages of Mr. Putin as the second president of Russia.

To recap: the consistently high rating of Vladimir Putin, Russia's second president and the prime-minister nowadays, is a pure Russian phenomenon. Putin's popularity cannot be satisfactory "explained" simply as the result of domestic political post-transitional processes, or as a popular reaction against external pressure, the growth of Russo-phobia in a near abroad, combined with the growth of oil prices. The roots of Putin's popularity are hidden in the Russian history and national mentality as well as in the construction of current political system and the western policy towards Russia.

The bureaucratic and business elite generally back on Putin's policy. His policy finds its stronger adherents among those Russians who have benefited financially from the transition to capitalism[33]. It is true to say that Mr. Putin went further transforming former state-run economy into a capitalist economy employing different tactics than his predecessor. If one agrees that Putin is not the architect of a corrupt bureaucratic system, just an ingenious builder, then he or she may more correctly interpret Kremlin's reaction on public discourses about domestic politics and elections.

VI. Conclusion

Among many factors that affect the Russian political culture the most important are the historical legacy, political, social and economic transformation's politics, and, ultimately, the current economic conditions of the life of the majority of the population as a product of regime's policy. The great problem for a resurgent Russia is how to overcome the legacy of the past, to bring about a cultural renewal in the relationship between the state and society.

It is well known that living standards and value standards are inseparable and that the correlation between them determines the quality of democracy and, finally, political culture, reflecting in the interpersonal trust dynamics. Russians are not exclusion of this general rule, yet there are certain

[33] The most of 'New Russians', including the Moscow–based business elite, have critical attitudes towards legislators, the government and local officials, and particularly taxation officers, but are optimists who believe in the happy future of their country. Of course, in some aspects of their existence they moved very far from the everyday life pattern of average Russian citizens. As far as it concerns the civil and not everyday line of conduct, these people identify their private business interests with the national interests as they are articulated by the Russian government. They carefully watch the dynamics of the US dollar or the EU euro exchange rates, because they gave their own foreign policy agenda. Foreign policy has always been an 'elite matter' in Russia, and this is even more the case now.

nuances.[34] Although basic values and attitudes of the majority of Russia's citizens towards revolutionary upheavals are similar to those of Europeans and Americans, Russians are different not only because of poorer living standards and widely-spread life dissatisfaction, but also because of a rather low degree of trust in democratic institutions, including the parliament and political parties.

We cannot simply explain the difference of attitudes to politics by reference to life circumstances or/and an income gap, because even the economic life does not carry its own self-evident meaning. What plain people and elites think about and act upon is always politics defined by media, and therefore by the big government is striving to control the TV channels.

Nowadays differences between the Russian business' elite and masses in values and a way of conduct are growing from day to day. The cultural gap is always behind what elites and masses act for and act against, or as the governmental action is perceived. Perhaps, in the Soviet period the discrepancy between the nomenclature (the ruling elite), intelligentsia and the working class in terms of attitudes and values was not as deep, as it is today.

Russian capitalism is not strong, democracy is weak. The entire post-communist political culture, which was originally based on trust in democracy as a universal political system that admits all forces acknowledging the current constitution, is undergoing the considerable erosion of its value foundation. However we do believe that Putin's team takes in account the national mentality. Power brings responsibility. Cooking policy is not an easy job for the Medvedev-Putin tandem. Russia as a nation still carries stigmas which created its image in the past. Today's The August 2008 Georgian-Russian conflict had severe damaged post-Soviet Russia's image. The outcome of the five-day victorious war against Georgia had definitely showed the resurgence of great power, but also had raise up a question about repairing of Russia's political influence in the world, and Russia's soft power, in particular.[35]

[34] The dynamics of interpersonal trust in post-Soviet Russia is rather confusing. The initially high average level of this indicator in early nineties (like in the Soviet time) dropped down in the second half of nineties due to an economic decline, and then started to rise up slowly (Rukavishnikov, 2008).

[35] Because of the limit of space in this chapter we do not discuss the link between popular perceptions of Putin's politics abroad and the Russian self-esteem either. Or why a resurgent post-Soviet Russia turned to demanding respect through a show of military force and using oil and gas supplies as a so-called 'energy weapon".

Both the past and the present-day Russian state policy and society are responsible for country's image at home and abroad, at least in part. This is why the today's Russian political culture must be seen not only as the pattern of collective ideas about the society in question, its social fabric and structure, and former, present and future place in the world underlined by values and purposes. It may also be seen as the country's attributive characteristic that depends upon the current political, social and economic system, and determines the political future, the rulers' style of governance, the nature of objectives the society is offered, etcetera. Cultural changes accumulate and manifest themselves as the Russian capitalism matures and new generations arrive. We believe that these changes will, to a large degree, determine the future political culture of this unique civilization.

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