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New Russian ideologies and public policy legitimation

Soviet Union was often characterized as an 'ideological state'; today's Russia seems not to be one. Russian Constitution prohibits any official ideology as something in contradiction with democracy and with the fundamental liberties.

Therefore, if we define ideology as a commonly adopted set of values and beliefs, especially of values related to broad society issues, and imposing some constraints for politically feasible in a given society, we can conclude that many contemporary societies have their own ideologies. At a high level of abstraction, there are no major differences between the communism as an ideology and the democracy as another one. Each society and each state adopting such a set of values tends to reinforce it by the law, by relevant political practices etc. The main difference between democracy and communist ideology, from this point of view, can be resumed in following terms: 1) main occupation of a democratic state is more about behavior of its citizens, than about their thoughts; for a communist or for another highly ideologized ('totalitarian' or 'ideocratic') state it is more about what people are thinking. Democracy is then more legalistic and communism more traditionalist and ethically oriented; 2) in a democratic society the main ideology is rather promoted by the government, than is it prescribed – at least, when legal norms are not under question. In a classical communist state the official ideology is prescribed to everybody and any ideological competition is prohibited.

During the 1990s the liberal, even neo-liberal ideology was essential for Russian state. Today the neo-liberal precepts are often rebutted by both the state itself and by the people; foreign observers also describe Putin's regime as a less and less liberal one. Floating between old-fashioned communism and uncertain neo-liberalism, contemporary Russian state seems to be ideologically naked; a strange situation which stimulate officials and intellectuals to compete for invention of a "national idea" – an activity referred by V.Putin as a 'preferred Russian game". Notwithstanding, any modernizing state, and even every state, needs a broad values' pattern to legitimate its actions. If we accept J.Lagroye's theory of four levels of legitimacy – i.e. broadest legitimacy of power, legitimacy of a regime, legitimacy of a government and its policy,

and the legitimacy of some concrete political action or actor,[1] we have to presume that different levels of legitimacy need different legitimating activities. The state ideology issue that is discussed here is about legitimacy of the regime: we do not consider philosophical problem of political power legitimacy, nor the legitimacy of a concrete government or political actor that is often build on isolated actions and then it doesn't need a structured set of values. At the same time, we presume that a regime' legitimacy is built on legitimacy of policies it undertakes.

So we shall consider different legitimacy patterns promoted by the Russian state. Each of these patterns represents a set of values; if a values' set becomes strongly structured and officially supported we can refer to it as to an ideology. We shall first describe a set of values, or a possible ideology, as a theoretical model, then we shall consider major policy issues adopting such an ideology and officials' statements confirming that, and finally we shall have a look on the perspectives of a large popular acceptance of that kind of legitimacy. Finally, we can have a look on the possibility of integration of the existing legitimacy' patterns.

First, Russian authorities often repeat that Russia is a 'social state', quoting relevant articles of the Constitution. "Social" in that context means 'redistributive', with a strong emphasis on public health care, social welfare, public housing, public sector wages, and on all services paid from the public funds. The existence of soviet tradition gives the claim for social redistribution more legitimate than in other countries.

40% of Russians consider that the right to get medical care and health services, is the most important, compared with other rights listed in Russian Constitution. That right is so at the first place in the rating, by the percentage of respondents, far before others like *habeas corpus* (34%), property rights (10%), the right to have one's own business activity (5%) etc. So called social rights are mostly viewed as more important than individual rights, excepting *habeas corpus*. [2] The same survey shows that social rights are viewed as not sufficiently applied in the real life; it can attest that there is a demand for larger social welfare and redistribution. At the same time, 42% of Russians choose the social equality as the preferred political value, compared with market and democracy values, and with nationalist values. The percentage of respondents

[1] Lagroye J. La légitimation // Traité de science politique. Sous la dir. De M.Grawitz et J.Léca. T.1. La science politique, science sociale, ordre politique. P. : Presses Universitaires de France, 1985, pp.368-395.
[2] Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) survey on values, July 2004, http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/man/valuable/tb042603

preferring equality as dominant value is going higher, compared with the last year. [3] About 46% would be interested in building a socialist state in Russia.[4] Of cause, we have to keep in mind that people can mean different things when they are speaking of 'socialism': especially, the quoted survey listed, as one possible kind of socialist state, the 'Swedish socialism' that is quite different from soviet, Chinese or North Korean socialism.

Therefore, the redistribution as a legitimating argument is rarely utilized by Russian officials in their discourse. Moreover, its use is often occasional and linked to some concrete isolated action, like recently initiated "national priority projects" bearing on health care, housing, agriculture and education. The "social state" rhetoric becomes more visible at the elections period and is going dawn after the State Duma and the President are elected. One can say that the redistribution argument is not a legitimating base for a whole policy, nor for the regime itself. It is easy to explain: most reforms going on in Russia are built to attend neo-liberal goals and do not fit with social oriented slogans. But electoral purposes enforce the governing party, *United Russia*, as well as new parties, as *Fair-Minded Russia*, to include social welfare related propositions into theirs agendas; it is going similarly for the President and for the government.

It is obvious that there is no question of any 'resurrection' of soviet ideology. Sure, Russian government uses and misuses of soviet symbols (like old soviet anthem for example), but such uses are more linked to the legitimation of the whole regime as successor of the past, rather than some concrete action or policy. It is remarkable that we have not found any important talk of the President or of the government members where the redistribution policy was directly associated with the soviet past.

Another legitimating or ideological trend is what we can surname 'entrepreneurialist state' or 'investor state'. The logic of these legitimating practices is capitalist but, paradoxically, it is not liberal. The Russian state tends to show that its behavior is structured by economic rationality, by an investment' logic: we invest to have profit; we calculate the best return, and so forth. Such reasoning is usual for economic issues, but modern Russian state uses it also for other policies that are not directly linked to the economy, at least in traditional Russian values' system.

[3] WCIOM survey on political values, April 2007, http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/4323.html
[4] WCIOM survey on socialism as a political perspective, March 2007, http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/4243.html

Especially, this kind of reasoning is dominating in administrative reform (which official goal is to reduce administrative obstacles for the economic growth), in education reform (which official goal is to provide the economy with working force that must fit the market demand), in demography policy (which official goal is the same), and even in social redistribution policy (which goals include a growth of the paying capacity and of the demand on the national market). From that point of view, every policy is investment oriented and is built on a capitalist logic.

An example can illustrate how important is that reasoning even for non economic policy issues. In 2006 Russian government started a demographic policy for supporting more elevated birth rates. One important part of this policy is so called "mothers' capital", a bank deposit of 250,000 rubles (about euro 8,000) that every woman receives from the state after birth of her second child. The sum is relatively important, and it matches average wage for 3 years in Russia. The law concerns only children born after January 1st, 2007.

Minister charged of health and welfare policy M.Zurabov explains why only women delivering a second child after January 1st 2007, not before, have the right to the "mother's capital":

> The President announced [the new policy] the 10th of May [2006]. We have counted [months], and the child can't be born before 2007.[5]

This example shows clearly the investment logic: the state would not pay for children who are born or conceived, the state invest only into the women who can give the waited return. It shows also why such a policy is not liberal: not only because liberals generally do not like important state spending, but also because a liberal approach supposes reasoning in terms of rights (an individual have the right to…), not in terms of return. It is interesting to remark that, speaking about future economic growth Russian authorities often cite some soviet examples of industrial progress and economic power. Such an allusion is perfectly legitimate: soviet ideology was based on the predominance of the economy over other social issues, too.

We can say that quite every Russian policy is legitimated by the government in terms of efficiency and profitability. So, not only the state supports capitalist logic of businessmen, but the state itself is acting as a businessman.

[5] Cf. Yana Serova, O detyakh i o vode, in: Novaya Gazeta, 2006, n 79, October 16th. Web-version: http://2006.novayagazeta.ru/nomer/2006/79n/n79n-s27.shtml

It is obvious that this ideology is not too popular in Russia. Therefore, 15 years of economic transformation have created an important group of capitalistically oriented people for whom such a logic is natural, acceptable and even preferred one. As this group is the more economically active group, it is crucial for the government to match its attitudes. Then, economic reforms enforce people to behave as investors regarding their private affairs, as family budget planning, education strategy, and so forth: investment as a style of individual reasoning becomes more and more common. Last but not least, investment' logic fits perfectly international obligations of Russia regarding financial organizations and creditors.

The third legitimating pattern, and the corresponding practices, can be referred to as 'racketeer state'. Theoretical foundations of 'racketeer state' concept can be found in Charles Tilly' work, especially in his article about state-making as organized crime.[6] Therefore, Charles Tilly argues only for two major characteristics of what he is calling a 'bandit state': first, that the extraction of goods is more important than investment or redistribution, and second, that the state is controlling menaces against which it would be a legitimate protector.

> Someone who produces both the danger and, at a price, the shield against it is a racketeer. Someone who provides a needed shield but has little control over the danger's appearance qualifies as a legitimate protector, especially if his price is no higher than his competitors'. Someone who supplies reliable, low-priced shielding both from local racketeers and from outside marauders makes the best offer of all.[7]

We think that main features of a 'bandit state' are not limited to these two, especially if we consider that it is really difficult to build any legitimating scheme based only on extraction, and on providing both the danger and the protection against it.

Another feature is the contempt of the property rights: the property can be taken, transformed, shared or even redistributed just by the force or by the fraud. The Russian state is actually built on this contempt, beginning from privatization in early 1990-s, and up to more recent cases when observers accuse the state to behave as an economic raider (the YUKOS affair is the most cited). The famous slogan addressed by the former deputy minister for Finances Livshits to the businessmen, "You have to share it!", is often followed by the state: private property can be used for state purposes,

[6] Cf.: Tilly Ch. War Making and State Making as Organized Crime, in: Evans P., Rueschemeyer D. and Skocpol T./ Eds. Bringing the State Back In. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. 169-191.
[7] Tilly Ch., op.cit., pp.170-171

and rights can be changed by the state. Finally, a 'bandit state' is a corrupted state, and corruption is here more than an illegal practice, more or less common, it is rather one of important mechanisms of the government, including law-making, official appointments and redistribution of public goods.

Nevertheless, can such a values' pattern legitimate something? It may sound paradoxically, but we think that this logic is largely accepted in Russia. First, the described model of reasoning is common for many social groups. It often remains common for businessmen, and surveys provided by Transparency International show that not only Russia is considered as one of most corrupted countries, but Russian entrepreneurs are likely the most active for proposing gifts and bribes even when they are contracting abroad. So, not only the corrupted state enforces people give bribes, but this behavior is often interiorized and accepted as a legitimate one. It is similar for property rights: current Russian proverbial expression, "when we take a small amount from a large one, it isn't for robbery, it's just to share", seems to be very popular and appreciated.

Recent example shows how Russian officials and public opinion can join one other in that attitude. In January 2007 a school principal, Aleksandr Ponosov was charged with illegal use of unlicensed (pirate) copies of Microsoft Windows and Microsoft Office on 12 computers being used in the school. This case caused larger public opinion mobilization supporting the teacher and criticizing the copyright law. A question about Ponosov's case was addressed to the Vladimir Putin during a press-conference. Russian president said:

> I am not familiar with this case… But to grab someone for buying a computer somewhere and start threatening him with prison, is complete nonsense, simply ridiculous.[8]
>
> *[More accurate translation of the last phrase would be "it's bullshit"].*

Survey by FOM shows that presidential evaluation of the case, made even before court decision, meets public acceptance and public support more than any other judgment. Arguments saying that the teacher is guilty because being violating the law, do not meet opinion support.[9] In this situation Putin explains the existence of the law

[8] Official transcript of the press-conference, held at February 1st 2007, Kremlin http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/01/1309_type82915type82917_117609.shtml
[9] FOM survey, February 2007, http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/right/sobstvennost/d070724

itself by the fact that "we do have obligations"[10]. Actually, the copyright issue gives to us thousands of examples proving the existence of that common contempt of property rights, common for people as well as for public officials.

Moreover, we can say that an important part of Russians not only consider illegal practices, regarding property and corruption, as something usual and granted: people accepts that the state behaves that way. Partially it is due to the long tradition of 'double mind', when official norms are often viewed by the people, as well as by the state, like something external, not really touching the day-to-day life.[11] Then, such a regime is legitimated by an illicit treaty between the state and the people: the things are going on if each of the contracting parts tolerates the illegal practices of the other part.[12] It is because 17% of Russians think that sometimes it may be good to vote for somebody having a criminal reputation or criminal activity.[13]

We can argue that three legitimating schemes listed before dominate actual Russian politics. Each of them represents a set of values, an official or sometimes tacit approval of these values, and larger public acceptance. Therefore, we cannot view these patterns as opposite; they are rather convergent, for many reasons.

First, there is not any identifiable political group behind each of these patterns. Sure, the redistribution ideology is often associated with communist party, but Russian communist party is not only one who argues for the redistribution. Sometimes the governing party is even more eloquent on this issue. Sure, the investment argument seems to be close to the neo-liberal ideology, but it is also used by communists; and we have seen that it is not really liberal. Sure, the 'bandit state' legitimacy cannot be declared in official way but it is largely supported by different political forces. Finally, if we analyze decisions and public talks of Russian president, we can find arguments using each of three logics.

Second, each of values' sets is supported by numerous groups of people, and the state cannot ignore it in its legitimating activity. But, for society like for political elites, these patterns are inseparable, and often the same people are arguing for investment, for redistribution and for robbery.

Third, each of these patterns, and even the existence of different legitimating patterns, is useful for public authorities. The so called 'pragmatism' of Putin's politics

[10] Official transcript of the press-conference.
[11] Cf.: Kharkhordin O. Oblichat' i litsemerit': genealogiya rossiiskoi lichnosti. S.-Petersburg: Ed. of European University at S.-Petersburg, 2002.
[12] Cf.: Prokhorov A. Russkaya model' upravleniya. M.: ZAO Expert, 2002.
[13] FOM survey on criminality and elections, July 2004, http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/right/tb043008

can be viewed as a value' management activity, when different arguments are used depending of situation. To continue to do it, Russian state needs to keep all these arguments alive, to actualize them every time.

The described configuration means, therefore, that any of listed patterns doesn't represent itself an ideology. To became an ideology, a legitimating pattern has to be more integrative, more consistent and, anyway, officially declared and approved. Moreover, no one of these patterns describes an attractive future, and it is main difference from classical ideologies such as liberalism or communism. We can criticize it, but we have to accept that both free market paradise and egalitarian paradise are different but attractive images of paradise. The integrative idea that can put together all the three patterns, and which is actually promoted by the Russian state, is nationalism. It becomes a common place, to discuss nationalist attitudes in contemporary Russian politics; we have to outline that not nationalism itself is important, but its usefulness regarding depicted legitimating patterns.

Nationalism is useful. Nationalism is neutral, regarding classical ideologies, so it permits to avoid any discussion about liberalism, communism, conservatism, and so forth. For the 'investor state' pattern, it can explain why one has to invest: for the nation' prosperity; and that is an attractive future. It is very important, if we consider that the image of the future proposed by liberalism was very popular in early 1990-s, but then its popularity becomes limited by the upper class.[14] In this situation, nationalism can legitimately fund the predominance of economic goals for the whole people. For the 'redistribution state' pattern, it can explain, first, why the redistribution policy is large or reduced, and, second, it can explain who will be the beneficiary, and under which criteria. For the 'bandit state' pattern, it can explain the existence of such attitudes by national traditions, by specific identity etc. Moreover, it can resolve a problem typical for that kind of state and outlined by Ch. Tilly: any state who behaves like this faces the danger of competition. For the Russian state the problem is inner, when Putin's regime faces challenges from the different oppositions. The problem is external, too, if we take in account pressure by international community and the emigration problem. Nationalist ideology can make the current regime unique, the only one. In the domestic politics area, nationalism legitimates any action limiting the opposition possibilities, if these possibilities are viewed and represented as anti-national. In the foreign politics area, tacit support of domestic illegal practices limits,

[14] Cf.: Shestopal E.B. Psikhologicheskii profil' rossiiskoi politiki 1990-kh. M.: ROSSPEN, 2000.

for the people involved in, the access to the international activities, because international norms prohibit these practices, and do not consent to pardon 'reasonable exemptions'. The situation with many Russian officials declared *personae non grata* somewhere abroad, or even wanted for an accusation, can illustrate this point. Finally, nationalist idea meets perfectly centralization of the state power, giving to the authorities indisputable argument of dominating national interest.

Nevertheless, nationalist legitimacy does not mean nationalist politics. We do not have any reason to argue that Russian state *becomes* nationalist, but we argue that it *represents* itself as more and more nationalist. An ideology-building activity is determined by some political conjunctures, like approaching presidential election and the need to guarantee political continuity. But, this activity is belonging on more long-time structural needs, too: the absence of a comprehensive identity menaces the state with instability and internal challenges. May be the most important conclusion is that in 8 years after the demission of Boris Yeltsin Russian state have not found other integrative ideology, to legitimate its divergent practices, but nationalism.