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**“Authoritarianism in Russia: Dangers for Democracy”**

**Project Abstract**

The authoritarian tendencies in contemporary Russian society are a regrettable reality. The assertion that an authoritarian government only can lead the country out of the current crisis has become a general fashion nowadays.

This notion is widely spread among the ruling elite, zealously searching an autocratic leader. Altogether, the inclination to the authoritarianism is more and more actively being revealed by diverse social groups. They, having recently rejected the authoritarian values, much evidently show the readiness for the ideological legitimization of authoritarianism.

This circumstance makes actual the thorough study of the phenomenon, its peculiarities, prospects and dangers in today's Russian context.

In the paper presented, a few most important tendencies linked with the authoritarian views dissemination are examined and the threats are shown that jeopardize weak, not well-established Russian democratic institutions and procedures.

The following conclusions might be drawn out of the research paper. The threat of authoritarianism is high in Russia. The strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in the country has given rise not by historically preconditioned reasons, but by today's current situation, i.e., the deep economic, social, political and ideological crisis.

Though, there are some actual factors able to counteract the consolidation of the authoritarian orders. The real perspective of the systematic crisis further aggravation does not allow to exclude any variants of development.

Nevertheless, the present onslaught of authoritarianism seems not to be the result of a certain fateful predetermination.

Russia stands in need of strong democracy capable of resisting authoritarianism, taking the country out of crisis and safeguarding it's citizens' security and prosperity.

The possibilities for this type of democracy exist. The question is how they will be used by society.

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**“AUTHORITARIANISM IN RUSSIA: DANGERS FOR  
DEMOCRACY”**

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## INTRODUCTION

The authoritarian tendencies in contemporary Russian society are a regrettable reality. The assertion that an authoritarian government only can lead the country out of the current crisis has become a general fashion nowadays.

This notion is widely spread among the ruling elite, zealously searching an autocratic leader with an “iron hand”. For all that, each group shaping the elite pursues its own selfish aims. Some of them count on preservation of unjustly accumulated wealth, others reckon upon redistribution of financial resources captured by competitors, some other try to have achieved political and administrative positions guaranteed.

Altogether, the inclination to the authoritarian forms of government is not limited by the ruling elite only. Diverse social groups are more and more actively revealing their interest in authoritarianism.

The social consciousness, resolutely rejected the authoritarian values in the past, more and more evidently shows the readiness for their ideological legitimization.

This circumstance makes actual the thorough study of authoritarianism phenomenon, its peculiarities, prospects and dangers in today's Russian context.

In the paper presented, a few most important tendencies linked with the authoritarian views dissemination will be examined and the threats will be shown that jeopardize weak, not well-established Russian democratic institutions and procedures. The research is mainly a sociological survey. That is why, general social and socio-psychological processes, but not the description of the real and concrete events and persons in force, are the center of our attention.

Two principal notions: authoritarianism and democracy are used as analytical tools.

Here, we regard authoritarianism as a form of the society's political organization when the power pyramid becomes reserved by a strong personality's authority who possesses either hereditary or obtained legitimacy and leans upon a selected cohort (aristocrats of spirit and body) that is vested with corresponding plenary powers and privileges.

The notion of democracy presupposes the system of society's administration with the institutions and the channels of the society's efficient influence on generally significant political decisions made by the governmental bodies and based on the traditions or the legal norms and the supreme political structures' preparedness for positive response to the impulses coming from below, from social institutions and personalities.

### **Brief survey of literature**

The range of views, what an authoritarian government should be in practice, is rather wide. There are apologists of rigid autocracy that does not much differ from totalitarianism. Parallel with them, there are liberal authoritarianism's adherents willing to combine an authoritarian government with the preservation of legal institutions and citizens' basic freedoms. There are also supporters of "temporal authoritarianism" that after its duties' fulfillment must pave the path for the democratic institutions.

Different juridical shapes of authoritarianism are suggested, i.e. a presidential republic with the concentration of the most important power functions in the President's hands; military dictatorship similar to all-powerful military juntas in Latin America; various monarchic structures from autocracy up to quasiliberal constitutional monarchy<sup>1</sup>.

The whole range of these views is also reflected in political publicism and special politological literature.

The most Russian scholars assume that the present Russia's regime is authoritarian one. Academician N.Ya. Petrakov thinks the present government can not be regarded democratic. The regime of one-man management with some democratic decorations is the years tradition in the country. There will exist exactly such a regime in the nearest future<sup>2</sup>.

T.I. Karyagina expresses the similar point of view on the prospects of Russia's development. In her opinion, now Russia "is approaching authoritarianism which, at any moment, threatens to turn into totalitarianism". She asserts the possibility of the totalitarian government's establishment in

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<sup>1</sup> Shevtsova, I. Klyamkin, L. "This Omnipotent, Powerless Power". *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. June 24, 1998. (in Russian)

Krasnov, M. "Constitutional Monarchy Will Save Democracy". *Nezavisimaya gazeta* - scenario. 8, 1998, p.6. (in Russian)

Russia very highly. But, she underlines that the term of such a regime's being will be very short<sup>3</sup>.

V.B.Kuvaldin characterizes the present regime as “a peculiar combination of authoritarianism, oligarchy (with criminal shade) and “the remains of the *perestroika* period's democracy”. He stresses that in the nowadays Russian super presidential republic the supreme power can do whatever it likes, it is accountable and subordinative to no one. At the same time, “there are preserved and consolidated a few most significant democratic gains of the *Gorbachev's perestroika* in Russia. More or less free and honest election is held, freedom of speech is kept, the basic human rights are not called in question (though not always observed), and the world ties are being intensively developed in all areas”<sup>4</sup>.

The eclectic character of political system and the presence of the controversial tendencies arise the change of movement in different directions. However, the historical compromise is possible on the ground of much fairer distribution of power and property”<sup>5</sup>.

In A. Fedorov's opinion, “the current political regime in Russia is a unique hybrid which managed to collect practically everything, i.e. the elements of open authoritarianism combined with formal democracy and an oligarchy's specific role in the country's administration against a background of the weakly developing structure of the democratic and civil institutions. This hybrid with its all inner contradictions is, nevertheless, rather stable due

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<sup>2</sup> The Russian Elite on the Country's Present and Future. M., 1996, p.328. (in Russian)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.p.284.

<sup>4</sup> Russia: Ten Questions on the Most Important Issues.M., 1996, p.15-16.(in Russian)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

to the absence of the national opposition system in the country that has the clear program of actions”<sup>6</sup>.

In the latest decades, due to the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in several Asian and Latin American states and then in eastern Europe, there has been spread an appraisal of authoritarianism as an intermediate stage on the transition way from totalitarianism to democracy. It is based on the following arguments.

Thus, in G.I. Vainstain’s opinion, “a certain degree of authoritarianism is absolutely necessary in the current situation if one means the firmness of power and the regimens to put everything in order. It should be admitted that the objective reality demands certain limitations of democracy. Russia’s society faces a very complex dilemma: either there will be selflimitation of democracy for the sake of keeping the progressive social transformation outlook, or a loss of democracy because of the blind adherence to “the purity of democratic principles”<sup>7</sup>.

At the initial stage of the society liberalization, the authoritarian power machinery makes much of “tutelary democracy’s”<sup>8</sup> functions. In this case, the activities’ essence will be not to permit the open clash between the society’s renewal supporters and conservatives and to soften the transition to the true democratic system.

A. Przeworski, estimating the “tutelary democracy”, admits, “Social and economic conservatism may be necessary price for democracy: political institutions that organize the democratic compromise must be designed in

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.19.

<sup>7</sup> Vainstain, G.E. “The Growth of Authoritarian Sentiments and the Fascist Menace in Today’s Russia”. *Polis*. M., 1995, N2. p.41 (in Russian)

<sup>8</sup> Przeworski, Adam. Democracy As a Contingent Outcome of Conflict. Constitutionalism and



such a way as to protect interests of the forces associated with the authoritarian regime and thus to minimize the extent of eventual transformations ... Political democracy is possible only at the cost of limiting social and economic transformations”<sup>9</sup>.

The description of “soft (gentle)” forms of authoritarianism one may find in German sociologist, Ralf Darendorf’s work. He notes, “Law-abiding citizens who assiduously attend to their own affairs and otherwise live inoffensive private lives need not fear the wrath of their leaders ... But those who criticize government for its unacceptable power, those who use their freedom of speech to expose nepotism, those who dare put up alternative candidates in elections - these people are in trouble”<sup>10</sup>.

The concept of “semiauthoritarianism” or “semidemocracy” - a Russian version of “tutelary democracy” - is suggested by L.A. Gordon<sup>11</sup>. The concept is widely recognized in Russia.

Its supporters, admitting the authoritarian orders’ negative features, justify them, nevertheless, as inevitable temporal cost.

I. Klyamkin, V. Lapkin, and V.Pantin note, “The “mildest” authoritarianism on the transitional stage from totalitarianism to democracy is the most acceptable shape of the political regime”<sup>12</sup>.

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Democracy. N.Y. 1998. p.60-61.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.80.

<sup>10</sup> Darendorf,R. Can We Combine Economic Opportunity with Civil Society and Political Liberty? The Responsive Community. 5 N 3 (Summer, 1995). p.29-30.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, L.A. The Logic of Drive off State Socialism: Perspectives of Semidemocracy in Today’s Russia. Report at the Carnegie Corporation Moscow Center Seminar. February 27, 1995 (in Russian).

<sup>12</sup> Klyamkin I.M., Lapkin V.V., Pantin V.L. Between Authoritarianism and Democracy. Polis.M.1995, N2, p.82. (in Russian).

Defending this statement, they put forward the following arguments. Russia is not prepared for democracy after many years of the totalitarian domination; it is the country where there is no market economy; no enough developed civil society; the confrontation political culture predominates; the mentality and behavior stereotypes grounded upon the state paternalism are rather stable; the country lacks the real political leaders, professionally trained to fulfil managerial functions in the democratic conditions. That is why, the democratic transformations are skidding.

Due to these arguments, the conclusion is made that for the democratic reforms' implementation Russia needs the authoritarian government which after putting everything in order will pave path for the transition to the democratic forms of power. The power itself, while accomplishing the reformist - enlightening functions, will gradually transfer into a milder form of government.

A. Tocqueville, a political sociologist, commented ironically upon the discussion on "mild despotism" or "parents power". He found that the aim of such a form of government is not "to prepare men for manhood" but "to keep them in perpetual childhood"<sup>13</sup>.

In the Russian situation, for people suffered torture by the delay crisis consequences the "pink" image of enlightened authoritarianism might seem quite attractive. Promising to put everything in order, it is likely to pretend not to interfere into persons' private life, not to control their thoughts, and not to regulate their behavior if only nobody encroaches upon the regime's monopoly to make imperious decisions.

However, it is easy to be trapped if one is tempted with such a bait.

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<sup>13</sup> Tocqueville, A. Democracy in America. Vol.II. N.Y. 1990. p.318.

K.G.Holodkovsky believes, “The notion of enlightened, liberal, civilized and “tame” authoritarianism in Russia where are such strong and deep historical traditions, will hardly work”. He stresses, if society does not resist authoritarianism, the present authoritarian forms of government will acquire much brutally and despotic character. In this case, the strategy of non-resistance “facilitates only the dictatorship’s accession to power in the rigidest shape”<sup>14</sup>.

The “wardship” authoritarian regimes, emerging on the wave of mass reformist movements, receive a primary charge of the revolutionary democratism from them. But being unable to stop the democratic process, they try to adapt themselves to it at the beginning. At the same time, checking the extremity of transformations, they prevent simultaneously the mass movements and their organizations’ potential to be manifested, they try to subordinate them to the regimes’ control and place them with their own selfish programming.

If the authoritarian regimes fail to achieve these purposes completely, it occurs only due to the existence of powerful counterbalances in society which press the government forcing it to make concessions and compromises.

It is quite an illusory hope that the political “wardship” is a temporal tool to get people prepared for the participation in management. One can’t help agreeing with R. Dahl’s saying that the argument of the paternalistic peoples’ nature looks like its defense and the ideal, and the most acceptable regime. In unison with A.Tocqueville’s words mentioned above, he states, “If collective

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<sup>14</sup> Holodkovsky, K.G. The Social and Social-Psychological Premises for Fascism. Polis. M.1995. N2. p.39. (in Russian).

decisions were always made by paternalistic authorities - by a body of guardians, let us say - then in the domain of public affair people could never outgrow their childhood”<sup>15</sup>.

The “authoritarian guardianship” positive impact is pregnant with great consequences and dangers for society. It is possible to establish it in rather specific condition and within a short historical period.

The reference to economic achievements of authoritarian regimes used in political publicism are based, as a rule, on the distorted interpretation of historic events.

In most cases (Spain, Chile, Brazil), the economic growth was caused not by the authoritarian regimes’ establishment but by their decay and by the authoritarian upper circles’ realized need to loosen the rigid means of the society’s administration, to liberalize control not only over the economic but also over socio-political processes. In its turn, the economic growth accelerated the authoritarian regimes’ destruction and promoted their final collapse.

The close linkage between the economic growth and the authoritarian regimes’ activities in a few Asian countries (Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia) was set up not by the higher efficiency of these regimes, but by the fact that all of them had been established within the framework of the authoritarian statehood, traditional for the region. The economic development turned to be squeezed in these traditional state forms because the non-authoritarian shapes of statehood could not just emerged there.

For all that, the authoritarian regimes did not so much facilitated the economic growth as adjusted themselves to it hindering it frequently.

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<sup>15</sup> Dahl, R. Democracy and its Critics. p. 105.

R.E. Sevortyan, a Russian scholar, fairly notes that in these countries “not completely formed but an obvious tendency of economic growth hampering by the authoritarian regimes is observed due to the approved entrepreneurship’s methods. Among the other reasons, one is the billions of financial resources going away from the state sector which because of corruption, embezzlement of public property, and bribery overflow into speculators’ pockets. On the economic modernization path, diverse obstacles spring up (the capital flight, detriment of bourgeoisie’s local unprivileged groups business activity, etc.)”<sup>16</sup>.

The authoritarian system even supporting the economic growth, simultaneously sets limits for an entrepreneurial initiative and individual activity, thus, making a destructive impact on national economy as a whole. One of the most convincing evidence is the financial and industrial crisis ridden the most Pacific countries in 1978-1998.

Authoritarianism in Russia is also fraught with hard social consequences: the delay of the systematic crisis, the shaping of the criminal oligarchic economy, the aggravation of the most population’s living conditions, and the society’s moral degradation.

There is a risk of the social outburst. The main menace, in V.Kuvaldin’s opinion, lies in the lack of the most populations’ support of the existing order. That is why, the safeguarding mechanism has become feeble and it will be uneasy to combat the serious actions of the radical opposition. In fact, the potential of mass protest up to the armed conflicts is growing<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Sevortyan, R.E. State as a Political Science Category. An Experience of Theoretical and Applied Study. Dissertation. The Institute of World Economics and International Relations, RAS. M.1996. p.254-255 (in Russian).

<sup>17</sup> Russia: Ten Questions on the Most Important Issues. M.1997. p.47 (in Russian).

N.Shmelev shares this standpoint. He marks, “there are two forces in Russia which seem able to set on fire and general catastrophe, i.e. the starving and desperate army and the depressive regions (the most menacing danger). Perhaps, the mass spontaneous outburst will have a lot of destructive consequences as it always happens in history”<sup>18</sup>.

### **The objective conditions favorable for authoritarianism**

Authoritarianism in Russia arises not on a vacant lot. It is being nourished by the objective conditions: economic, social, state-institutional and cultural-spiritual.

Economic preconditions are determined by the fast disintegration of the centrally managed economy taken place after the August events of 1991 and, especially, after the USSR collapse. Because of weak and inefficient market regulation mechanism, the rapid disintegration has resulted in the loss of control over the economic process. A stake on radical liberal experiments which were to automatically ensure the transition to democracy and market economy has failed. On this ground, there appeared the desire to overcome the crisis by using strong extra-economic levers of influence. Having gotten shaped in the country, the industrial-financial corporations gravitating towards the authoritarian methods of government have become influential bearers of this desire. Small and middle business, suffering from the bureaucratic tyranny and mafia lawlessness, are oftener and oftener appealing to a “firm

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<sup>18</sup> Shmelev, N. Do We Want to Disappear from the World Map? “Literary Gazette”. M. 1996. December 4 (in Russian).

hand". People's worsening economic situation also promotes the authoritarian tendencies' growth, as it will be shown below.

Social preconditions for authoritarianism have come about as a result of cardinal changes taking place in the position, role and interrelation between different social groups and strata. The abrupt breakup of the established system of ties has upset the settled hierarchy of social identification. New forms of estrangement have arisen as caused by the demolition of social being.

In the unsettled and indefinite situation of the loss of aims, an increasing number of people looks for their identity and self-expression sphere beyond the framework of the conventional social structure.

The state-institutional (political) prerequisites for authoritarianism were preconditioned by the collapse of the former administrative system which had provided the state organism's functioning as a single whole. An alternative structure created instead turn to be non-functional. Faced with the threat of full power disintegration fraught with anarchy and civil war, the inclination to administer by using the command methods grows.

Behind the democratic veneer, there began the inception of the power institutions in their orientation and modes of activity close to those which had existed in the former system. Thereby, the authoritarian trends receive an instrumental apparatus and financial levers for realization.

The regulating and checking socio-psychological mechanism of socio-political life collapsed together with the institutions of former power.

At the same time, the creation of principally new democratic mechanism faced a lot of difficulties due to the absence of a fundamental condition for working democracy, i.e. mature civil society.

## **Possible consequences of authoritarianism consolidation**

What are possible consequences of authoritarian political system's consolidation in Russia? What does the international experience say about the issue?

Analyzing it, one might come to the conclusion that the authoritarian regimes can obtain certain positive results in three cases:

Firstly, when a country becomes a victim of an external aggression threatening its existence. It is easier for an authoritarian regime, than for any other, to concentrate the material resources, to mobilize the population for the country's defense, to inspire the military forces with the victory's belief, and to provide the continuous functioning of the rear.

Secondly, when civil war has broken in a country. The authoritarian power can rapidly put an end of civil collisions.

Thirdly, an authoritarian government might be useful in the situation of progressing break-down of social structures. If usual political means are not able to prevent such a break-down, and the main social political forces are either discredited or paralyzed, the set up of an authoritarian regime might prove to be the only way out of a menacing catastrophe.

There is, however, another side of a medal. The historic experience convinces that the authoritarian regimes have such defects which bring to naught their possible advantages. The authoritarian governments once settled loose the efficiency very soon. Their mobilizing capacity does not last for a long time. The efficiency becomes imaginary and "ostentatious actions" substitute the results. The problem's resolution quite often turns to be



“virtual” and involves the emergence of new much more complicated issues than those the regime would manage to get rid of.

The paralysis of the self regulation system of the social life’s subjects evokes serious consequences. The voluntaristic decisions peculiar to the authoritarian system of power break the social organism’s balance and functioning as a single whole. The blockade of the feed back from the lower subordinated links of the hierarchical vertical deprives the policy-making center of the true information about the real situation. Thus, the regime loses its capacity to correct the strategic line and concrete decisions.

The concentration of power in one person’s hands (or a narrow group of a ruling circle) reduces the level of the society’s management due to several factors. Firstly, a limited number of issues that a person is able to evaluate and resolve has physical boundaries. Secondly, the accepted decisions are become deformed under the influence of the nearest circles and “court intrigues”.

The authoritarian power’s managerial vertical line can adequately communicate the impulses from above only in relatively primitive societies. The developed and complex structured systems must have public checking mechanism for such communication.

At every segment of the authoritarian vertical line, “deviating noises” arise as caused by the individual or group interests, far apart from the upper circles’ interests”. The “deviating noises” are sometimes so loud that they “muffle” initial content of above made decisions.

Overcoming the “noises” needs to have a great number of inspectors that evokes an intensive growth of the bureaucratic apparatus.

Moreover, the inspectors themselves become influenced by “deviating noises” and a problem of inspectors’ check arises.

Furthermore, the authoritarian management, because of slowness and inflexibility, fails to become adapted to the current rapid changes.

A defect system of personal selection is an authoritarianism’s heel of Achilles.

Neither professionalism and qualification nor abilities and moral qualities but personal loyalty and absolute submission make much of importance while employees are promoted. There is no place in the management left for independent persons of principle. The outcome of this negative selection can be partial (or sometimes full) paralysis of the management.

Authoritarianism prevents the regular change of power. As a rule, an authoritarian leader keeps holding office even when he has exhausted all his potentialities. The regime set up by him starts decaying gradually down to full bankruptcy, more and more isolating itself from society. That is why, there is no ground to reckon upon the temporal establishment of the authoritarian power that will allegedly give its seat to the democratic government after fulfilling its functions. This reckoning is fruit of pious imagination.

Might we think that the authoritarian regime shaping in Russia is capable to resolve the current social issues at least if aforesaid is taken into account?

It is an illusion to think that it is possible, at the worst, in the economic sphere. To prove this allegation, the following arguments are given.

Firstly, one may trust to have rapid and complex legislation for the transformation process. But, it is known, the practice of laws’ democratic adoption is not much efficient in nowadays Russia. Due to the long discussion and concordance, laws are being approved too slowly. The

process of consideration and agreement of the numerous and diverse interests are resulted in adoption of super-compromisal and inner-contradictory laws which do not work on the whole.

To some extent, it is true, altogether, it does not mean that the urgent problems will be resolved quickly and efficiently by the authoritarian regime. The different groups of the ruling elite will press and this pressure will result in inconsistency and nonefficiency. The presidential power's decree mechanism in 1994-1998 is an obvious evidence of it.

Besides, even the "mildest" authoritarian forms of power can not limit themselves by laws' elaboration and implementation, and avoid a temptation to control over them, depriving the courts of their functions or violating their independence. The laws will serve not the aim of the society's reformation but the interest of the dominating elite groups.

Secondly, supporters of the authoritarian methods suppose that they are helpful to accelerate the formation of the market institutions, to secure the rights of private property, and owners' material and juridical responsibility, to create the managerial mechanisms in joint-stock companies, and to introduce the practice of entrepreneurship and freedom of contracts, etc. They say, the authoritarian government better than the democratic one would make the cardinal changes in finance, credit and bank spheres.

Replying to these statements, one should note that the efficiency of these aforesaid measures is mostly based on a degree of possibility for the governmental bodies to come to a mutual agreement. Unfortunately, the ground for it did not and does not exist in Russia. The executive power (both President and the government), not having an integral concept of the economic transformation at the beginning, acted using a method of tests and

faults, quite often swerving from the approved principles under the pressure of conjuncture circumstances and lobbies' groups. In this situation, no authoritarian shifts will help. The regime which suffers from the deficit of political will and the social support is not capable to carry out the effective policy of reforms if it even chooses the authoritarian methods of governing. The Russian power's peculiarity, at least for seven years of so-called radical-liberal reforms, is mostly the preoccupation with itself, i.e. with strengthening its own powerful positions<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, the authoritarian government in today's Russia whatever shape it takes and whoever it forms, is not able to implement a consistent and successive economic reform that will help the country out of the hard crisis. At the best, it can take the palliative steps which will conceal the contradictions and will most likely come to an end in stagnation. Under the protection of authoritarianism there can be a formation of hierarchical market substitute, a specific sort of authoritarian corroborative market system.

B.Kapustin, a Russian philosopher and politologist, fairly marks, "It will not be a market of free competition but an *oligarpolistic* market with the dominance of symbiotic forms of power and property"<sup>20</sup>. One might surely enough see the frames of such a market.

The authoritarian "setback" will not satisfactory resolve the Russian socio-political issues. Among them are social justice and citizens' rights, the regulation of conflicts and interethnic relations, public concord, creation of a legal state, formation of multiparty system and democratic political culture,

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<sup>19</sup> Chernishov, S. The Century of Power Transformation. In Other Words. Russia as a Subject. M. 1995. vol.2. p.247. (in Russian).

<sup>20</sup> Kapustin, B. Liberal Idea and Russia. In Other Words. Russia as an Idea. M. 1995. vol.3.p.149. (in Russian).

development of self-government. The world practice shows these problems are resolved only by means of a long and broad dialogue of various public forces resulted in the establishment of democracy but not of authoritarianism.

So, the application to Russia, above described “partial”, “mild”, “enlightened” authoritarianism which tries to play a role of a Russian democracy “guide” is a romantic illusion in most cases.

Not having a counterbalance in arising civil society, the authoritarian regime, whatever “mild” it would be at its source and what intentions its masterminds could have, will do its best to conquer absolute power. Nobody can count on its interest in the consolidation of democracy foundation, i.e. the institutions of civil society which would be able to control power by organized citizens who have managed to realize their public needs.

The negative consequences of the authoritarian government are also evident in cultural and ideological sphere. It is next to impossible to restrict publicity, freedom of information, and manipulation of public consciousness.

A lot of scholars, cultural and educational workers living in poverty due to the great commercialization might be tempted by hope that the authoritarian government will be eager to considerably subsidize these spheres. Such grants in aid may quite obviously be provided but only under a definite social order. Our society is fairly acquainted with it. It is not pardonable to forget the lessons of the past because of the current difficulties.

There is no doubt, the authoritarian “setback” will complicate the Russia’s entry into the world community just started with many obstacles. Not authoritarianism, but democracy only will help to enhance the Russia’s international prestige, and to make it a center of attraction for the Euro-Asian geopolitical region.

The authoritarian experiments will hamper the outlined process of reintegration of the USSR former republics and intensify the other states and the world community's suspicion on the revival of Russia's imperious aspirations.

### **Democratic values' discredit as a favorable ground for the authoritarian sprouts**

The political regime consolidated after August 1991 identified itself as a totalitarian power's antipode. It proclaimed antiauthoritarian slogans and the most population accepted it as democratic. That is why, the trust in democracy in people's consciousness was closely linked with the trust in new power. This trust (or "political capital" if we use a term suggested by P.Bourdieu, a French politologist) was rather high initially.

The outcomes of the first Russia's president election in 1991 and some other people's wills proved it in particular.

The new forces, having come power in those conditions, succeeded in possessing the considerable political capital and started presumptuously estimating it as a constant state. Whereas, political and financial capital can increase or waste. It is mobile and a degree of its mobility depends upon a great number of circumstances.

Upon a degree of stability and dependence of origin, the political capital can be conditionally divided into three groups. The first is the political capital rooted in century-old traditions and nourished by stable world outlook and confession. The political capital of the second group, accumulated during the process of formation, consolidation and activities of the institutional bureaucratic regimes of postmonarchic type, has high though less stability.

The political capital of the third group has specific features. It can be named after P.Bourdieu the “borrowed” political capital. It is based on a credit of trust.

The political forces striving for changes get it from society dissatisfied with the current situation and disappointed in the ruling government.

The “borrowed” political capital is, first of all, an advance that ought to be justified. It may be grounded on rational or irrational basis and reflect the non-acceptance of the existed orders and the desire for changes regardless their content. In the last case, the political capital is the least stable.

Under favorable conditions, it is easy to obtain, but it is much more complicated to retain.

The political capital of the regime associated with B.Yeltsin was fully “borrowed”. Consequently, to retain and strengthen it, the government had to carry out thorough policy that would take an account of society’s general sentiments and expectations so to face the people’s interests. In practice, the new ruling circles interpreted the gotten political capital as “*carte blanche*” to make a few social experiments. They were implemented according to the vulgar theoretical notions of Russian home-bred radical liberals who copied the western neoliberals’ receipts thoughtlessly.

The faults and mistakes hung as a heavy burden over the government are the straight results of an initial choice.

The situation kept getting worse because the new ruling elite turned to be incapable to achieve immediate targets. To some extent, it may be explained by the duality of the ruling elite’s shaping.

On the one hand, it was shaped by the representatives of the second and third echelons of the USSR communist party and economic organizations and by men of “shadow economy” united with them.

On the other hand, it was replenished by the former intellectual counter-elite who came to power on the opposition wave to previous system and was not prepared to fulfil practical tasks. They lost their best representatives on the path to power. These parts of the ruling elite kept an existence within the framework of the powerful structures but were not completely integrated into them.

The specificity of the elite’s shaping predetermined the reproduction (partial or sometimes full) of previous behavior stereotypes. The ideological “taboos” elimination advanced the most negative sides of these stereotypes.

Of course, a lot of energetic and gifted persons found themselves in the ruling elite. However, we mention some common features, saying nothing about personalities. The most essential common features are as follows: the dominance of corroborative interest over public and national ones; the prevalence of group and persons’ selfishness, the lack of general and professional culture; the deficit of bright leaders and talented politicians; high degree of bureaucratism with all defects inherent to it; the low moral level; the utilitarian pragmatism; the absence of all national solidarity.

So far, the new ruling elite came out under the democratic slogans and was perceived as such by people, its conduct was discrediting the democratic government to the growing degree and, therefore, it was loosening the ground for the authoritarian sprouts.

### **The significance of the economic and social policy failure**



The ruling elite's political capital and, consequently, the population's beliefs in democratic values and institutions are, to the most extent, based on the promise to improve the economic situation in the shortest period of time and to raise the people's standard of life. It causes the excessive social expectations.

What were the economic and social outputs of the adopted policy?

The first years (1992-1994) of its translation into life resulted in the reduction of industrial production and deterioration of all economic indexes. The new power's economic policy supporters explained these outputs by the heredity of the past. The negative indexes were presented as a payment for the accomplishing transformation. It was asserted that the country had to pay such a high price for the creation of prerequisites for the national economy rapid development and the economic growth new phase. 1995 was announced as a turning point of the crisis.

But, neither in 1995 nor in 1996, a sudden change occurred. On the contrary, in mid-90-s there began more dangerous phase in the economic development that revealed the deadlock nature of the economic policy. The accumulated resources having been the dope for the ailment economy before, started coming to the end. The bottom of the seemed bottomless boiler of public wealth showed up. The state expenses became hung up on two ropes: inner borrowing and foreign credits. Both of them hardly stood the tensile strength. The international debt increased up to the dangerous size. The foreign loans raised from the international financial institutions drew nearer to the rational limits.

The diminution of inflation - the radical liberal policy masterminds' issue of pride - resulted in unprecedented growth of mutual failures of pay. The

state itself became the main defaulter. The foreign private investments proved in most cases to be in “briefcases”, in other words, they were of speculation type. Being highly mobile, they strengthened the instability of the Russia’s financial system. The huge home capital flight was fixed. The non-payment into the budget, outside budget funds, the common refusal to pay taxes, and the escape into “shadow economy” became of mass nature.

In full scale, the crisis situation was displayed in summer 1998. The share of the state financial pledges’ service exceeded a third of the budget assignments. In spite of the great financial infusion made by the international creditors, mostly by the International Monetary Fund, heaven thundered. The government’s incapacity to make service of the enormous international debt was admitted officially, a part of international financial pledges was frozen and the ruble was considerably devaluated. This undermined the financial system. The banks payments were limited and, in some cases, broke off. The deposits mass withdrawal began. The stoppage of import supply arose. The fall of the gross domestic product volume and industrial production accelerated.

The ministers’ replacement unprecedented for Russia reflected the depth of the crisis; for less than two years three cabinets of ministers were dismissed.

The current situation acquired the signs of a systematic crisis. The efforts to overcome it failed. A new model of economic development has to be found.

The policy of reforms aimed to advantage the democratic forms of government became compromised. The government economic policy’s failure influenced very negatively the overwhelming majority of citizens’ living

conditions<sup>21</sup>. The calculations of the Center for Economic Conjuncture under the Russian government present the following dynamics of pure (i.e. corrected by the consuming prices' index) per capita income: (1998-100): 1992 - 43%; 1993 - 52%; 1994- 53%; 1995 - 45%; 1996 - 47%; 1997 - 42%.

Judging by the index of per capita average net income, the Russian people's standards of living decreased by two times on the eve of 1998. If one takes into consideration the forestalling increase of prices, the growth of transportation and housing-communal costs, the reduction of public funds of consumption and social aid, the decrease might be estimated as thrice-repeated. After August 1998, the half of per capita average net income cut down. Now the average wage in Russia is one of the lowest in the world. The peculiarity of the Russian reality of the latest years is systematic non-payment of wages.

The structure of consumption changed for the worst. The per capita average consumption of meat and meat products reduced from 74 kgs. (at the rate of 75 kgs.); of milk - from 378 kgs. to 232 kgs. (at the rate of 360 kgs.); fish - from 27.4 kgs. to 9.4 kgs; eggs - from 264 to 207.

The standards of life's reduction was accompanied by social polarization. The decimal coefficient displaying the correlation between 10% of the most prosperous and 10% of the least prosperous citizens shows the degree of differentiation. According to the evaluation of the Russia's Security Council experts, the top permissible correlation of this index is 8 to 1. In 1991 this coefficient was 4 to 1; in 1993 - 11 to 2; in 1995 - 13 to 5; in 1998 - 1 to 20. Yet, there is a ground to think that the data of the RF State Statistic

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<sup>21</sup> Here and further see. Kondratyeva, T.S. Russia: the Dynamics of Social Components: the Standards and Quality of Life. M.1998. and "Russia: the Dynamics of Social Components. M.1998. (in Russian).

Committee is understated because wealthy citizens avoid informing the statistic bodies about the real volume of their incomes.

The tension on the labor market increased. The number of unemployed counted according to the ILO standards reached up to 3.6 million in 1992 (4.8% of economic active population); 6.4 million (8.9%) - in 1997.

After the August-September 1998 failure, the unemployment index estimate grew in two times. The period of people's inability to find jobs prolonged.

In such hard conditions, pensions and other social allowances become the only income, a lot of families manage to get. Besides, the expender on social benefits is so little in Russia that it has stepped over the top permissible low level. As a result, there is a great scale of poverty. In 1996, the category of the poor included 32.0 million (21.6%) citizens. In the end of 1997, from 7 to 10 million people had the income similar to the standards of life but 31.1 million (21.0% of population) were regarded "the poor". The crisis aggravation in August 1998 enlarged these figures considerably. In October 1998, in accordance with the data of the RF State Statistic Committee, 42 million people (28.6% of population) were on the list of the poor. But, a lot of experts think that the threshold of poverty calculated by the RF State Statistic Committee has been put too low and defines not the threshold of poverty but the "extreme standard of misery" in its essence. The calculations of the All-Russia Center for Standards of Life's experts show that the category of the poor should include 58% of the Russian citizens.

The expected length of lifetime is a general index of country's well-being and a nation's health condition. Its rate started lowering in mid-60s in Russia. In 1991, the rate was 69 years for population as a whole (64 years for men

and 74 - for women); in 1996, it was brought down to 66 years (60 - for men and 72 - for women). Nowadays, an average Russian man lives only 57 years. Demographers noted this unprecedented rapid lowering of the lifetime length. By this index, Russia came down to the level of Asian and African backward countries and now occupies 135 place in the world.

The sharp aggravation of population main groups' existence was followed by the visible moral degradation of the Russian society. The forcible state property privatization which assumed a criminal character could not help influencing the society's morals. The criminalization appeared in the last years of the Soviet power acquired the scale of national disaster. All strata of socium - from the ruling elite to the social bottom - are infected by this disease. The criminality raised beyond the bounds able to secure the system self-preservation. The organized criminal gangs, having consolidated their positions in the economy, began to put in a claim for political power. It is not a surprise that in this situation everything to any extent linked with power or its institutions evokes social strata's sharps negative sentiments.

### **Population's estrangement from power as a chance for authoritarianism**

So far as in mass consciousness, the fault of all negative consequences of the society's reformation is lain with the political forces in power in 90-s, it has decisive impact on the attitude not only to the powerful institutions but also to the democratic values that were used to justify the pursuing policy.

The flat refusal of the current regime's trust is the obvious sign of the change in social consciousness. The first signs of this change already appeared in 1992. It kept going the following years with a different degree of

intensity. In 1995 all sociological barometers marked the high level of social irritation. The Russian politologists interpreted the population's estrangement from power quite variously - sometimes from polar positions - depending on authors' value orientation. The liberals often reason upon a great share of those who have rejected the radical model of economic transformation and negatively evaluated the current situation to citizens' political immaturity and their perceiving the changes through the prism of dependant and paternalistic stereotypes of the Soviet period. The arguments to prove this standpoint are as follows: The steady alteration in social-political consciousness and adoption of new norms and institutions presuppose the change of generations. The primal unit of a scale of the consciousness' alteration is not years but decades. This is particularly relevant for Russia. For seven decades (three generations' active lifetime), the mass consciousness has been formed under the conditions of the state socialism dominance. The shaped views of the powerful institutions and their functions are firmly rooted in people's minds. That is why, they appreciate the new civil political institutions slowly and more difficulty than in other postcommunist countries. It will need not less than 20-30 years to make the most population admit these new points of view<sup>22</sup>. The liberals suggest conformable prognosis. "In the light of the generation scale notion of the country's political institutionalization period, the speed of the process is not a matter for excessive pessimism. No doubt, the major strata do not become aware of or feel today's life as correct, normal and fair. However, it is very important that adults' one fourth or one third has already admitted the new orders, new institutions and values and preferred

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<sup>22</sup> Gordon, L. Klopov, E. The Social Context of Political Institutionalization Process in Today's Russian Society. M. 1997. p.17-18. (in Russian).

them to former ones. For the transformations commensurable with generation's lifetime, such a share of their adherents looks like a hopeful factor after five-ten years of the movement start"<sup>23</sup>.

The logic of aforesaid statements proceeds from the axiom that the changes in a country and, consequently, the alterations in the social consciousness are the straight development from bad to good. But, the Russian reformation went another road. The social-economic changes in 90-s were performed in such a way that they provoked tearing mass consciousness away from the democratic values. as a result, the mass consciousness evolution was not going toward their striking root but toward an authoritarian choice.

Another interpretation of the dynamics of the relations between population and power issued from the inevitable social outburst reflected the left groups ideas and had an apocalyptic nature. It was grounded on the axiom of the automatic connection between the degree of people's trust in power and the extreme forms of political conduct, i.e. the trust presence guaranties the social stability, the trust absence evokes the social outburst. By the way, there does not exist any automatism. The mass political conduct has high inertia due to the influence of diverse factors including damping.

At first, B. Yeltsin's regime got the political capital large enough to stand the initial tests caused by the wrong policy and the methods of its pursuing. It managed to alleviate the fatal consequences of social-political differentiation and the most population's rapid impoverishment by the liberties' reservation gained in *perestroika* years. The markets full of goods facilitated the trust in better future and created illusion of the nearest well-being. Such measures as

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.18-19.

ban-lifting of private commercial activities, wide access to trips abroad, etc. seemed very hopeful.

The political stabilization became possible due to the intensive vertical mobility kept going with the radical-liberal reforms. Of course, adventure and criminals scammed the “wild market” cultivated by the government. Nevertheless, a lot of young, energetic and active citizens got a chance to occupy very important positions in various spheres of public life, mostly in the economy, and consolidated there. Thus, the most dynamic group of the population usually played a role of a social outburst ferment found itself attached to the established order. In addition, the partial preservation of the social infrastructure gotten by the new government from the Soviet period had an essential damping impact over the fatal consequences of the radical liberal policy.

All these factors stifled the burdens of everyday’s life and restrained the rise of mass discontent. The monitoring of public sentiments made by several study centers including the Institute of Sociology, RAS in 1996-1998 stated clearly the “syndrome of stable balance” as a lasting feature of Russians’ mass consciousness<sup>24</sup>.

The aforesaid factors and notions proved the unsoundness of simplified views that the fall of the political trust credit would inevitably result in non conventional political actions, mass disorder, rebellions and revolts. The political consequences of the trust in power’s loss are not so simple. They do not rise the mass political actives by themselves. Such a loss much oftener stimulates person’s initial estrangement from politics. Then, obvious

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<sup>24</sup> Kozireva, P.M. Russia: Changes in Social Structure and Social Consciousness. M. 1998. p.72. (in Russian).



social irritation starts growing voicelessly. It goes together with a state of dejection and deep feelings of close catastrophe. The object of discontent is frequently substituted. In this case, the social irritation takes a shape of extended aggressiveness directed not so far against the powerful institutions as against this or that social or ethnic group. There can arise a phenomenon of mass estranged hostile attitude toward the governmental bodies when the most population ignore the government's decisions and observe its convulsions with unhidden malevolence.

There is a need of several conditions to have diverse signs of public dissatisfaction crystallized in more or less conscious forms of group and mass conduct.

The most important of them are the high level of social tension and the distinct people's personal identification with their social community.

In mid-90s the social discontent did not reach the critical level. In this sense, data of almost three years studies of the Institute of Sociology, RAS which fixed the very weak sentiments of personal identification with large social community is rather representative. It happened so because the material hardships and the crush down by everyday troubles gave rise to tiredness and distrusted people's spiritual and physical strength for the adaptation to the uneasy economic situation.

The lack of the society sharp reaction to the growing burdens, evoked by the pursuing economic and social policy, played a wicked joke on the ruling circles. They got confirmed of the population's readiness to tolerate further the monetarist experiment without any complain. The thesis of the Russian people's historically preconditioned tolerance was widely spread.

The regime ignored the clear and evident signs of the qualitative turning in social consciousness and, consequently, in mass strata's political behavior.

August 1998 revealed the complete loss of the political credit given to B. Yeltsin's regime. The outcomes of the public opinion polls made by some serious sociological centers showed it undoubtedly.

According to data of the All Russia Center for Public Opinion Studies (ARCPOS), in September 1997 66.9% of respondents assessed the Russia's economic situation as bad, in September 1998 their share grew up to 91%<sup>25</sup>.

Similar data (90%) was got out of the poll held by the Russian Independent Institute of Social and National Issues (RIISNI).

The dynamics of the Russians' share trusting in President of the Russian Federation, who personifies the political power in the country, was characterized by the following findings: December 1997 - 19.4%; June 1998 - 12.0%; October 1998 - 3.6%<sup>26</sup>.

There increased the citizens' share striving for President's removal before the end of the designated term of office. In 1998 their number was 56% (the Bureau of Applied Sociological Surveys data<sup>27</sup>) and in September 1998, it reached 66% (the Public Opinion Foundation data<sup>28</sup>).

The extension of the citizens' negative attitude toward the regime as a whole testifies not only qualitative but also quantitative alteration in social consciousness.

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<sup>25</sup> The Monitoring of Public Opinion. Economic and Social Changes. M. 1998. N 6(38). November-December, p.48. (in Russian).

<sup>26</sup> Gorshkov, M. 42% of Polled Russia's Citizens are Ready to Lie on the Rails Themselves. "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" 07.18.1998.p.8. (in Russian).

<sup>27</sup> Popov, N. On Different Sides. "Nezavisimaya Gazeta". 08.06.1998.p.8. (in Russian).

<sup>28</sup> Nezavisimaya Gazeta.09.04.1998. p.3.(in Russian).

By the ARCPOS data, 41% respondents described the current regime's governmental bodies as "distant from people" (similar evaluation of the Soviet power's ones was given by 8%); 63% - as "criminal and corrupted" (13% - in the Soviet period); 32% (8%) - as "inconsistent"; 30% (8%) - as "weak and helpless"; 2% (21%) - as "authoritative and respected"; 2% (36%) - as "close to people"<sup>29</sup>.

The RIISNI poll in summer 1998 revealed the analogous findings. In comparison of the findings inherent in the USSR with today's Russia, the data was as follows. 77.2% of respondents considered the economic situation in today's Russia "hard" but in the USSR of L. Brejnev's time - 4%; 88% of respondents in today's Russia named "the uncertainty in the future" as a state of public consciousness and 2.4% - in the USSR. Near to the above stated was the correlation of other findings: inspiritualness - 77% and 9.3%; social injustice - 75.1% and 7.0%; corruption and bribery - 77.7% and 23.2; criminality and gangsterism - 93.5% and 2.8%.

On the contrary, in today's Russia 7.5% estimated the social security as of high degree and 78.0% - in the USSR; cheerfulness - 9.3% and 71.1%; trust between people - 7.4% and 65.1%; success in education - 9.4% and 65.1%<sup>30</sup>.

After August-September 1998, the number of citizens completely non-accepting the present regime grew by those who yet, in May had defined their

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<sup>29</sup> Sedov, L. The Political "Destruction" in Nature and Minds. The Monitoring of Public Opinion. 1998. July-August N4.p.13 (in Russian).

<sup>30</sup> The Citizens of Russia: How They Feel and What Society They Want to Live in. The Analytical Report under the Provision of Ebert Ctiftung Moscow Center. (in Russian).

sentiments as “normal, calm” (35.6%); considered their families’ financial position “middle” (39.3%) and thought “life is hard but tolerable” (41.6%)<sup>31</sup>.

The RIISNI poll in the end of October 1998 showed that the share of those who regarded themselves as beneficiaries of the reforms was only 5.8%. The share of those who neither got anything nor lost - was 18.8% 63.6% found themselves lost.

The share of those who thought the extreme forms of protest possible exceeded 70% by the data in the end of 1998<sup>32</sup>.

In January issue of “*Foreign Affairs*” journal Stiven R.David, an American professor, clearly warned. “At no time since the civil war of 1918-20 has Russia been closer to bloody conflict than it is today ... Expectations raised by the collapse of communism have been bitterly disappointed, and Moscow’s inability to govern coherently raises the specter of civil unrest ... As the massive devaluation of the ruble and the current political crisis show, Russia’s condition is even worse than most analysts feared. If conditions get worse even the stoic Russian people will run out of patience”<sup>33</sup>.

### **The growing interest in the authoritarian forms of government**

The dead failure of the political trust which the power, perceived initially as democratic, possessed can not helping resulting in the deep changes in the structure of people’s value orientation. It would be wrong to identify the disappointment of the population’s substantial part in the regime with the

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<sup>31</sup> The Monitoring of Public Opinion. 1998. N6(38). November-December. p.48 (in Russian).

<sup>32</sup> Gorshkov, A. The Country after the Regular Crisis. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. II.25.1998. (in Russian).

<sup>33</sup> *Foreign Affairs*. January-February 1999.vol.78. N 1.p.112-113.

society's decisive turning from democracy to authoritarianism. Nevertheless, the loss of trust in the moral principles of democracy and in the efficiency of the democratic institutions stimulated the interest in the possible authoritarian forms of government.

While time was passing by, the negative experience of previous authoritarian governments was being covered with psychological patina. On the contrary, the current regime's vices gave the rise of nostalgic sentiments. As a result, the thirst for the authoritarian forms of government got spread not only among the ruling elite but became phenomena of social consciousness.

Appraising its scale, it is important to avoid an exaggeration. In principle, no society is free from a totality of individuals whose mentality and values are of an authoritarian type. It is characterized by the non-acceptance of individual freedom as a value in itself, by the striving to dominate, by inclination to perceive information not on their own, but according to prevalent stereotypes, by intolerance to everything that goes beyond habitual frames, by ability to fit easily in any community getting dissolved in it, thus, finding the supreme meaning of their existence, etc. Usually, people with this type of consciousness constitute an insignificant minority, occupy a marginal position in society, and do not essentially influence political life.

Russia is not an exception. Surely, the peculiarities of its difficult and historical path made an impact on people's mentality and resulted in a certain increase of the authoritarian minded share of the population, a little bit more than in the western countries, but, not to a crucial degree.

We would like to refer to data of the Russians' socio-political orientation survey held in 1992-1993 by the Institute of Sociology, RAS.

Table 1 sums up the results of the cluster analysis of respondents' distribution in accordance with their attitude to the different forms of government in 1992.

**Table 1**

Preference	%
Convinced democrats	3.4
Sympathetic for democracy	28.5
Intermediate group	49.5
Sympathetic for authoritarianism	16.5
Supporters of rigid authoritarianism	1.7

*(Data of the Sector of analysis methodology of social processes, the Institute of Sociology, RAS. (in Russian)).*

The results mentioned above seem to be quite raising hopes. About one third of respondents expressed their adherence to democracy. The most respondents occupied the intermediate position that gives the ground to consider them as a potential reserve of democratic institution supporters.

One may assume that the individuals stating themselves as supporters of rigid authoritarianism are to be attributed to the authoritarian socio-psychological type. Among those who are sympathetic for authoritarianism, a lot might not be much convinced "authoritarianists" but they are mostly not satisfied with non-efficiency, non-competence and failure of the present government. Under the experts' estimation grounded on the poll data, the portion of those who, without any doubt, can be attributed to the authoritarian socio-psychological type comprised about 5-8% of the Russian population at that time.

After 1992, the share of authoritarian minded people started to grow noticeably. The public opinion poll held in June and October 1994 by the ARCPOS obtained the results as follows.

**Table 2**

*Question: Do you agree that the principles of western democracy are not compatible with the Russian traditions?*

*(the percentage of respondents)*

Variance of responses	June 1993	October 1994
fully agree	24	23
rather agree	21	25
rather disagree	18	19
absolutely disagree	11	8
difficult to respond	26	25
correlation between agreed and disagreed	45:29	48:27

*The Monitoring of Public Opinion. Economic and Social Changes. M.1995. N2 March-April. p.9 (in Russian).*

In November 1994, ARCPOS requested respondents to express their attitude to one of three statements.

- 1. Democracy does not fit to Russia.*
- 2. Russia has not matured for democracy yet.*
- 3. Democracy is shaping in Russia.*

The received data was as following: 43% of questioned replied positively to the first and second statements; 16% - to the third; 41% - abstained from an answer<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> The Monitoring of Public Opinion. Economic and Social Changes. 1995. N2. March-April.

At the same time, the International Institute for Marketing Studies (IIMS) has got analogous outcomes. Face to face interview made in July 1991 showed that 51% of respondents thought “democracy is better than dictatorship in any case” but in the next polls this figure was reducing steadfast and reached 35% in July 1994. In contrast, in July 1991 only 20% of respondents agreed with the statement that under certain conditions dictatorship may be better than democracy, but in July 1994 their share rose up to 30%.

The distribution of answers to the question of a preferable political system testifies similar mode of mind.

**Table 3**

*Question: Do you agree with the following statements. (2080 “Face to face” interview, January-February 1994. The percentage of respondents).*

	Yes	No
1. The former communist system must be restored.	31	60
2. The army must rule the country	14	85
3. As a matter of fact, we do not need the Parliament and elections, but we need a strong personality able to make quick decisions	63	36

Two years later in February 1996, within the framework of the project “*Russian Regions: Specific Socio-Economic and Political Problems*” funded by the University of Calgary-Gorbachev Trust Fund (UCGF) an analogous public opinion poll was conducted. The question was: “*Does Russia need an imperious leader now?*” 53.3% of questioned answered



“yes”; 24.6% - “rather yes, than no”; 7.2% - “rather no than yes”; 4.1% - “no”; 8.0% - abstained. 25.3% of respondents agreed fully or conditionally with the statement “*Democracy does not allegedly fit to Russia*”<sup>35</sup>.

Table 4 based on the results of ARCPOS surveys manifests a very significant dynamics<sup>36</sup>.

**Table 4**

*Question: Are there such situations in the country’s life when people need to have a strong and imperious leader? (The percentage of respondents, data of abstained is not given).*

Groups of questioned	“Yes” (constantly)		“Yes” (sometimes)		in no case	
	1989	1996	1989	1996	1989	1996
Age						
under 24 years	21.7	34.2	15.5	32.3	46.9	15.8
25-39 years	20.4	28.9	15.5	35.3	50.4	19.8
40-59 years	30.5	40.0	19.6	30.5	40.3	17.7
59 years older	32.6	45.1	9.6	27.8	42.3	18.3
<u>education</u>						
higher	13.0	21.1	20.3	42.2	60.1	29.2
high	21.9	33.9	14.9	32.1	48.7	19.0
below high	36.9	45.7	15.0	27.5	34.6	13.1
∑Total	26.2	36.7	15.7	31.7	45.1	18.2

<sup>35</sup> Data of IIMS and “Russian Regions” Project was kindly presented to the author.

<sup>36</sup> Levada, Yu. Complexes of Public Opinion. The Monitoring of Public Opinion. Economic and Social Changes. January-February 1997. N4.p.10.(in Russian).

Data of final sociological surveys in four subjects of the Russian Federation carried out in autumn 1998 within the framework of the project “*Russian Regions*” revealed the following distribution.

**Table 5**

*Question: There is a notion that democracy fit in principle to some foreign countries but is not applicable to Russia. What is your attitude to the notion?  
(The percentage of respondents).*

	Nijni Novgorod	Stavropol region	Hanti-Mansy autonomous region	Orlov region
yes, agree	15	20	12	15
rather agree than disagree	17	13	17	14
rather disagree	24	17	19	24
no, disagree	27	27	27	29
difficult to respond	18	22	24	17

On an average, 30% of respondents shared the notion that democracy is not applicable to Russia.

In spite of dispersed data obtained by various studies centers, the general tendency is undoubtedly obvious. During the period between late 80-s and early 90-s and the second half of 90-s, the Russian people’s authoritarian orientation has enormously increased. This phenomenon apparently occurred not because of the growth of the authoritarian socio-psychological type individuals’ share (it is impossible during such a short period of time but mostly under the influence of the above stated crisis in the country).

The people's worsening living conditions have predetermined the growing degree of the democratic values estrangement and, consequently, the inclination to support the authoritarian forces. The territorial unevenness of the political preference structure testifies this linkage. The inclination to support the authoritarian tendencies differs in the population's various strata. It is much higher among engineering-technical personnel and qualified workers of the military-industrial complex, low and middle managerial employees, some creative intellectuals, employees of law and security bodies, army officers and unemployed, i.e. among those who have suffered the most from the social-economic shock.

There is, obviously, a great difference between the authoritarianism preconditioned by innate psychological features and the authoritarianism evoked by outer circumstances. For the first type, the authoritarian situation is the natural environment of existence but for the second the issue of the most efficient way out of the difficult and critical situation. As a matter of fact, there are various (or, at least, not coinciding at most) systems of values.

The content of the first type (authoritarianism "a") has been introduced above.

The system of values peculiar to the second type (authoritarianism "b") is characterized by the following key notions.

1. **Security** that is realized as the government readiness and ability to cope with the criminal wave overflowed Russia, to protect the citizens from bureaucrats' self-will and informal military formations, the end with inter-ethnic conflicts.

2. **Legality** that is interpreted as a stable order under which the succession and the inviolability of juridical deeds are secured, property rights

are guaranteed and corruption seized the managerial structures is put to an end.

3. **Statehood** that reflects the feeling of outraged national dignity and supposes the politics able to stop any attempts of Russia's further split and the violation of its interests on the international arena.

4. **Traditionalism** that is oriented on Russia's socio-cultural peculiarities and historically built way of life.

One may feel persuaded that the linkage of these values with authoritarianism as a form of the social life organization is rather superficial and conjectural. Strong democratic power is possible which would correspond to these political values and realize their positive content. The world's political experience has proved it more than once.

Yet, if the government named itself democratic is not able to provide the citizens' normal conditions of living, to protect common national interests and values, and to put the country in necessary order grounded on, though conservative, but quite vital requirements, an aspiration for the society's effective management acquires the orientation for the authoritarian forms of power.

More and more people set hopes on an "iron hand" ready and capable to resolve all existing problems. The notion is being rooted in a part of population's consciousness that democracy is not compatible with a strong government, and authoritarian power only can guarantee the existence of a legal state.

A collection of values' notions given above passed through the prism of a similar perception are at variance with a number of the democratic values, such as political and ideological pluralism, the representative system of

government, the responsibility of MPs to the voters and of executive power - to the Parliament, etc.

Having stated it, one should not ignore two important circumstances.

**Firstly**, in the Russian society there are powerful factors of counteraction to authoritarianism. The most significant out of those are as follows.

- The negative experience of the rigid etatist and paternalistic system's functioning and its pernicious consequences still fresh in the memory of millions.

- The unwillingness of the most intellectual and politically engaged citizens to sacrifice the achieved democratic gains.

- The started formation of independent subjects of socio-economic life already having a significant antiauthoritarian potential.

- The ruling elite's heterogeneity that prevents its consolidation round one personality with a sufficiently integral unifying actions program.

- Uneven and disparate economic, social and political development of the Russian regions which obstacles the formation of a monopoly system of the authoritarian institutions.

- The absence of an influential political forces on the political arena having a nationally recognized leader and prepared to act as a backbone for the authoritarian regime. Thus, the degree of the democratic values support is still rather high in the Russian society. It arises from the tables given above.

Moreover, we would like to refer to data of the poll held in December 1998 by the Institute of Sociology, RAS within the framework of the project "*Russia in the shaping global system*" (the Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow and the Carnegie Corporation, New York).

Answering the question “*What type of the political system would you prefer to have in Russia?*”, 56.7% of respondents chose “the democratic government rested on free elections”, only 26.6% - supported the dictatorship setting up rigid discipline in all spheres of life; 16.7% - abstained.

60.9% of respondents named the development of democracy and citizens’ initiative as a very important trend of the Russian society’s progress<sup>37</sup>.

Similar data was obtained in the final poll of the project “Russian Regions” mentioned above. Respondents in the RF four subjects were asked, “*Do you support the establishment of democracy in Russia in the strict sense of the notion?*”

The distribution of responses is given below.

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<sup>37</sup> Nowadays Russian Society: the Transitional Period. The Outcomes of the Russian Population’s Sociological Survey. December 1998. ISRAS.M.1998.p.13.27. (in Russian).

**Table 6***(The percentage of respondents)*

	Nijni Novgorod	Stavropol region	Hanti-Mancy aut. region	Orlov region
yes, undoubtedly	30	24	34	38
rather yes than no	38	30	31	32
rather no than yes	11	11	8	15
no, undoubtedly	8	17	7	11
difficult to respond	13	18	19	14

Data indicates the potentiality for democracy in Russia is far from being exhausted. But, it is not unlimited and needs to be maintained.

**Secondly**, the verbal bias towards authoritarianism (frequently of emotional nature) does not always define the personality's real choice of the concrete forms of society's organization and its institutions. The supporters of authoritarianism "b" are often notable for it. They bring into concord the verbal bias toward authoritarianism with the positive attitude to democratic election of the supreme governmental bodies, citizens' political rights, freedom of speech, etc. In most cases, the negative evaluation of democracy reflects the disappointment with democracy's functioning in Russia and its concrete degree.

### **The variant forms of authoritarian power**

Three variant forms of authoritarianism are usually mentioned in Russian political publicism.

**One** it is softened (quasidemocratic) when basic economic and political freedoms are preserved but the space of democratic rights that limits the freedom of power's actions is narrowed. For instance, the election of representative bodies is temporary annulled, the Parliament's control of the government is brought to naught and the division of power is eliminated.

**Two** - it is much severer when the traditional authoritarian methods (the Parliament's dissolution, the opposition's suppression, the ban on political parties' activity, the restriction in freedom of speech and in other political freedoms) are prevailed in the political sphere. At the same time, broad liberalization of economic life is permitted and encouraged.

**Three** - it is rigid authoritarianism that closes in upon totalitarianism and, in certain conditions, turns into it. The economic difficulties only are not enough for its establishment. But, if they are combined with the aggravation of social issues (including national and international ones) the ruling circles can resort to total state regulation and control over all spheres of public life.

The articulation of the authoritarian regime based on criterion of rigidity is theoretically fully justified. It helps to have more accurate notion about the possible authoritarian modes and the degree of fraught danger.

Still, the presented typology is too general and does not allow to bring fully to light the Russian specificity. That is why, in application to the Russian situation, the typology should be added and concretized by the real aspects of authoritarian threats.

One of the menaces is a gradual "crawling" into authoritarian power relations, to some extent, in an "authoritarian situation". It is the situation whereby the ruling circles are trying to preserve the constitutional democracy veneer while actually usurping all of the power functions. The most part of



this way Russia passed after the political overturn in the fall 1993. It ended with the new Russian Constitution adoption which consolidated the excessive concentration of power in the President's hands and sharply restricted the authority of representative and judicial bodies.

The "crawling" into the "authoritarian situation" was going latently, behind the curtains of the official political process and mostly unnoticed by public. Nothing appeared to be changing in the norms and procedures. While in reality, the democratic channels of power enforcement and control were being blocked covered by imitating maneuvers.

The gravity center of the power functions was getting increasably shifted to the sphere of relationship between narrow groups of people.

The "authoritarian situation" in its initial shape contains a lot of negative features, peculiar to "developed authoritarianism" The information impulses from bottom do not give the chance to the center to evaluate the rapidly changing situations.

The management decisions made in these conditions either do not correspond to the society's objective demands or are proved to be unfulfilled.

The voluntarist selection of personnel results in the recruitment of inappropriate persons to the leading state posts and personnel's reshuffle.

All this significantly deforms the process of the Russian democracy development.

The peculiarity of today's Russian authoritarianism is that the regime's mobilizing capacity is not extending but, on the contrary, it is falling to the lowest level.

The most serious threat ensuing from the “authoritarian situation” lies in the fact that the social groups and individuals are “getting accustomed” to a high-handed use of coercive strength and administrative actions, and, therefore, to the state of actual political tyranny and lawlessness. The orders established in those conditions are quite likely to become an interim station on the way to rigid authoritarianism. The institutional frames and social-psychological prerequisites are rather favorable for it. Different forces are able to make use of them.

The scale and parameters of a possible authoritarian “crawling” will depend on a lot of circumstances, in particular, upon the economic conditions, skill and energy of the political elite that supports authoritarianism, on its ability to establish a connection with the society’s mass strata.

A possible version of the authoritarian “crawling” is legitimate coming to power due to the election of the political forces openly supporting the authoritarian forms of government.

The political practice of those forces, regardless of what slogans (left or right) they proclaim, will be inevitably aimed at undermining democracy. The “authoritarian situation” and the society’s sharp crisis conditions will be used for the gradual dismantling of the real democratic institutions.

Most probably, mass media, civil society’s structures, elections and power’s representative bodies will become the first victims.

None can exclude the establishment of the authoritarian orders in Russia as a result of military coup d’etat supported by people.

The regime set up after such a military coup d'état might be the rigidest, pursuing the radical political actions. It will surely assume the aspects of state-nationalism.

In today's Russia, the ways and methods how to resist the authoritarian threat are widely discussed. The priority is given to the social forces' activization capable to combat the infiltration of the authoritarian values, notions and behavior stereotypes, as well as, to more effective usage of administrative and legal means to safeguard democracy.

But the most important factor is the political system and its institutions ability to find a key to the solution of the crucial economic and political issues, thus showing the advantages of the democratic forms of governing.

Strong democracy can efficiently resist the negative tendencies of the Russian society's development. Its important feature is the powerful bodies' capability to resolve the burning problems people face, with keeping their democratic nature (freely elected, representative and accountable to society).

Democratic thinking always runs against contradictions, on the one hand, democracy means personality's freedom, on the other, all citizens' common good demands its limitation.

Otherwise, democracy will rapidly turn into tyranny of the strong over the weak. That is why, strong democracy must clearly define its own boundaries. As a matter of fact, it is achievable in strictly drawn legal frames demarcating freedoms and permissions.

Strong democracy's another condition is an ability to safeguard itself from any encroachment on the basic values.

Some weaknesses of the government's democratic forms - i.e. the observance of procedures that hinders the operational decisions; the

coordination of all positions that causes half-and-half approaches and compromises; long discussions which take too much time - reduce the advantages of democracy in counteractions with opponents. In the system of strong democracy, these weaknesses must be compensated by the competence and activities of its executive' bodies.

In fact, democratism of a political system is defined by population's participation in its functioning, therefore, the issue of strong democracy shows up as a problem of involving citizens and civil society's institutions in the political process.

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions might come about out of the paper presented.

The threat of authoritarianism is high in Russia. The ruling elite's influential circles are inclining to it. Nevertheless, the present onslaught of authoritarianism seems not to be the result of a certain fateful predetermination.

The negative tendencies can be counterpoised by the will of those who would not accept despotism and autocracy under whatever guise.

The strengthening of the authoritarian tendencies has been given rise not by historically preconditioned reasons, but by today's current situation, i.e. by the deep economic, social, political and ideological crisis.

So far, it occurred through the political forces' faults who proclaimed themselves democrats and due to whom the totality of democratic values became compromised in public mind.

One should differ those who support the authoritarian forms of government because of their selfish bias, inner psychological features or the peculiarities of the socialization process, and those who reveal verbally the readiness to support such forms of government opposing the intolerable living conditions.

If for the former the authoritarian situation is natural and desirable environment, for the latter it is a mean to search the most efficient way out of the critical situation.

In essence, we deal with the different (or, at least, in many respects, non-coinciding) systems of values. Given circumstance creates additional chances for the effective resistance to authoritarianism, to its isolation from the potential mass basis.

There are some actual factors able to counteract the consolidation of the authoritarian orders in Russia. Though, the real perspective of the systematic crisis further aggravation does not allow to exclude any of these variants. Among the most possible ones is the transformation of today's "authoritarian situation" into the rigid authoritarian - totalitarian regime. The institutional frames and social-psychological prerequisites are quite favorable for it. Different forces can make use of them. The government established by them will most likely assume the aspects of state nationalism.

Russia stands in need of strong democracy capable of resisting authoritarianism, taking the country out of the crisis and safeguarding security and prosperity of its citizens.

The possibilities for this type of democracy exist. The question is how they will be used by society.

