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EPIGONIC TOTALITARIANISM IN RUSSIA¹

ABSTRACT This article aims to identify the dynamics of the Russian political regime and explain its sources. The article addresses the research problems of what the dynamics of the Russian political regime entailed from the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war to the end of Putin's third presidential term as well as the sources of the dynamics. It verifies the hypothesis that the authoritarian regime started adopting totalitarian elements of the party-state apparatus, totalitarian political gnosis, and mass and controlled social mobilization in time. There were very strong neo-imperial tendencies and post-imperial nostalgia which contributed to the epigonic nature of the system changes. However, qualitative change of the system has not occurred. The research makes use of source analysis and the technique of conceptual content analysis to gather the data necessary to evaluate the changes in the Russian political regime in the mentioned aspects. The researchers triangulated mass media information and monographs and adopted the principle of theoretical sampling to verify the information necessary to recognize the values of the three indicators. Furthermore, the research applies three dual typologies of the essential features of political regimes to differentiate between the state of the system during individual ellipses of bifurcation.

Key words: totalitarianism, Russia, Putin, epigonism, bifurcation

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INTRODUCTION

Totalitarianism is often perceived as a type of political regime that has the most extreme non-democratic features. Therefore, according to this approach, while democracy is defined as freedom of speech, pluralism of political structures, and fair elections, totalitarianism is the total lack of freedom of speech, the monism of political structures, and falsified elections.² Although this dual typology is useful for comparing political regimes, it does not allow us to identify the essence of totalitarianism. It is not true that any political regime is only a mirror image of another regime. Each regime has its essential features which together are a nucleus, or in other words, a kind of DNA deciding about the existence of a separate social world. Where totalitarianism is concerned, the article assumes that the most important features are: totalitarian political gnosis, the existence of a party-state apparatus, and a high level of controlled or directed social mobilization.³ It is worth emphasizing that repressions are not peculiar to any type of political regime because they are one of the forms of social control necessary to maintain the existence of every social group.⁴ Similarly, a charismatic leader is not a characteristic of political systems because a totalitarian regime can exist even if it is ruled by a body without a dominant leader.

A totalitarian regime can be described as an ideal type when, first of all, the party-state apparatus is the only structure organizing social life, and thus there are no social groups that are not subordinate to it. Secondly, a given type of totalitarian political gnosis is not only used in communication in public situations, but it is also the only internalized way of thinking about supra-vegetative issues. Thirdly, political mobilization is universal, unconditional, and treated as obvious. Only a few regimes approached this ideal type in the 20th century; and at present, North Korea and Tajikistan are closest to it. A large part of non-democratic regimes is authoritarian with more or less significant elements of totalitarianism. In order to investigate where a given political system lies between the ideal types of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, it is necessary to verify the existence of the elements of the party-state apparatus, the extent and the intensity of totalitarian political gnosis, and the scale of controlled social mobilization.

This article aims to identify the dynamics of the Russian political regime and explain its sources. The case study of Russia is a challenging task since the state is socially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.⁵ Apart from that, there are very strong neo-imperial tendencies and post-imperial nostalgia. This paper analyzes the essential features of the Russian political regime from the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war to the end of the third

² W. Zimmerman, *Ruling Russia. Authoritarianism from the Revolution to Putin*, Princeton 2014.

³ R. Bäcker, *Nietrادیcyjna teoria polityki*, Toruń 2011.

⁴ V. Gel'man, "The Politics of Fear: How the Russian Regime Confronts Its Opponents", *Russian Politics & Law*, vol. 53, no. 5-6 (2015).

⁵ Y. Sairambay, "Post-Soviet Russian Nation-Building: 'Purposefully Ambiguous' or 'Sufficiently Flexible' with 'a Russian Flavour'?", *Slavonica*, vol. 24, no. 1-2 (2019).

presidential term of Vladimir Putin. Ukrainian Maidan interpreted in geopolitical terms meant a total loss of control over Ukraine for Russia.⁶ The annexation of Crimea with the simultaneous presence of Russian troops in Transnistria, Belarus, across the Eastern border meant, in strategic terms, that Ukraine ceased to have any possibilities of an effective defense against Russian aggression. The war in Donbas, in turn, was nothing more than a repetition of the Abkhazian and Ossetian scenario in Georgia, the Transnistrian one in Moldova, etc. Note should be taken that a smoldering armed conflict effectively blocks the development of any state. The military-political operation in February 2014 aimed to restore the possibility of Russia's existence as a power with all the consequences resulting from it, including the features of the political regime.

In turn, the end of Putin's third term (starting from the appearance of the movie "He Is Not Dimon to You" Russian: "Он вам не Димон," "On vam nie Dimon") is the beginning of the process of de-conformization of mass political attitudes. This process began accelerating even more after breaking the unwritten social consensus⁷ the most important manifestation of which was raising the retirement age. Therefore, in March 2017, the bifurcation of the political regime began. Importantly, this system has the dynamics specific to itself mainly due to the increasingly visible manifestation and growing state of political subjectivity of the social masses. Thus, the dynamics of political changes, which until now were mainly between the ideal types of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, have become much more complicated.

The article addresses the research problems of the dynamics of the Russian political regime from the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war to the end of Putin's third presidential term as well as the sources of the dynamics. It verifies the hypothesis that the authoritarian regime might have started adopting totalitarian elements of the party-state apparatus, totalitarian political gnosis, and mass and controlled social mobilization in time. There were very strong neo-imperial tendencies and post-imperial nostalgia which might have contributed to the epigonic nature of the system changes. However, the qualitative change of the system might not have occurred. The research makes use of the method of source analysis and the technique of conceptual content analysis to gather the pieces of data necessary to evaluate the change of the Russian political regime in the mentioned aspects. The researchers triangulated mass media information and monographs⁸ and adopted the principle of theoretical sampling⁹ to verify the

⁶ J. Biersack, S. O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2014).

⁷ M. Marody, *Sens zbiorowy a stabilność ładu społecznego*, mps, Warszawa 1985.

⁸ O. Drozdova, P. Robinson, "A Study of Vladimir Putin's Rhetoric", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 71, no. 5 (2019); R. Bäcker, J. Rak, *Between Hero and Savior? Russian Songs about Putin* [forthcoming]; B. Rosenfeld, "Reevaluating the Middle-Class Protest Paradigm: A Case-Control Study of Democratic Protest Coalitions in Russia", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 111, no. 4 (2017); J. Rak, "How to Measure Political Gnosis? Empirical Evidence from Putin's Russia", *Przegląd Politologiczny*, no. 4 (2017).

⁹ K.F. Punch, *Introduction to Social Research. Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, 3rd ed., London 2014, p. 134; S. Spangler, *Accelerating Discovery. Mining Unstructured Information for Hypothesis Generation*, New York 2016, p. 42.

information necessary to recognize the values of the three qualitative indicators. Furthermore, it applies three dual typologies of the essential features of political regimes to differentiate between the state of the system during individual ellipses of bifurcation.

PARTY-STATE APPARATUS

This part of the article addresses the first research question, which is: were any manifestations of creating one party-state apparatus present in Russia after the annexation of Crimea? The comparison of the formal political structure existing in February 2014 with the one functioning in 2018 shows that it is rigid to a very high extent. While the first-type party of power United Russia had a dominant position in the state apparatus,¹⁰ other political groupings were the second-type parties of power or quasi-opposition structures and were marginal. However, in non-democratic systems, the invariability (or rapid volatility) of organizational structures does not mean significant changes in any case.

The first issue is the scope of dependence between the Kremlin and political parties, mainly the second-type parties of power (e.g. Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Communist Party of the Russian Federation) and the quasi-opposition parties. Financial flow systems, selection during the registration of candidates in the elections, access to television (the main means of communication for about 75% Russians) and the use of compromising material ("kompromaty") were established in the Yeltsin era and earlier. Putin's officialdom has shaped these systems so that they do not have to use overly radical means of repression.¹¹ However, after the annexation of Crimea, a new phenomenon emerged. The personal, financial, and decision-making dependence was complemented with the level of program unification which has been rapidly increasing since February 2014. The slogan of great Russia, the attitude of hatred towards Ukraine and the dislike of the West, the myths of victory over fascism, including the slogan "We can repeat," were common not only for the broadly understood statocratic Kremlin ruling group, but also for communists, ethnic and populist nationalists, social democrats, fascists, national Bolsheviks, and many other political and ideological groups. This ideological-mythic community was combined with a very high level of real public support for President Putin amounting to 86%. Anti-Occidentalism, neo-imperialism, and acceptance of the hierarchical political structure formed a unified conglomerate allowing for any organizational transformation of the entire political system, including the creation of a unified party-state apparatus.

Such a path of transformation was possible through the appropriate use of the All-Russia People's Front (Russian: Общероссийский народный фронт) whose indeterminate

¹⁰ V. Lasnier, "Russia's Opposition Movement Five Years after Bolotnaia: The Electoral Trap?", *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 65, no. 5 (2018); M. Słowikowski, *Jedna Rosja w systemie politycznym Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Łódź 2018.

¹¹ A.V. Ledenova, *Can Russia Modernise? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance*, Cambridge 2013.

competences extended from the platform of joint meetings to the unification of all groups. This organization was established in 2011 to unite and to coordinate activities of the pro-Kremlin social organizations, i.e., associations of entrepreneurs, trade unions, veterans' organizations, youth and women's associations. The major political task of the All Russia People's Front was, however, to propose the candidates of United Russia (Russian: Единая Россия, tr. Yedinaya Rossiya) in the elections to the Duma.¹² However, until 2013, this Front was active to a relatively low extent.¹³ After registering and changing its name in 2014, there were no significant press releases about the Front's activity. For the most part, the All Russia People's Front's candidates started from United Russia's list, or, being formally independent candidates, were institutionally associated with this party during the term of office.¹⁴ Through the system of assigning tasks and supervising high-ranking civil servants, this organization became an institution forcing total compliance with Putin.¹⁵ Thus, the president could dramatically increase his power to the typical position of a totalitarian leader.¹⁶ Nevertheless, there is no evidence of any activism of the All Russia People's Front officers except for rare meetings with Putin. The president's proponents did not consider this organization a career path in the political system. It was much easier for them to pursue a career in the political structure within the already existing vertical mobility paths.¹⁷ Officials, political activists, and volunteers did not treat this organizational structure as a path of promotion, mainly because its use did not allow for a significant improvement of life circumstances. It is the lack of interest that determined the non-utilization of this possibility of transformation.

One of the typical ways of social advancement in traditional totalitarian structures was the activity in party fighting squads. The analysis of the functioning of party fighting squads in Russia after 2014 concerned the following organizations: SERB (Russian liberation movement) – South-East Radical Block, NOD (National liberation movement), Anti-Maidan, Sorok sorokov (equivalent to a “large number”), Russia Officers (All-Russian civic organization “Russia Officers”), and Neo-Kazachestvo (New-Cossacks).¹⁸ While it was typical of European party fighting squads in the interwar period to function as part of a given political party, the situation is different in contemporary Russia. The

¹² O.J. Reuter, *The Origins of Dominant Parties. Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia*, Cambridge 2017, pp. 107-158.

¹³ G.V. Golosov, “Do Spoilers Make a Difference? Instrumental Manipulation of Political Parties in an Electoral Authoritarian Regime, the Case of Russia”, *East European Politics*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2015).

¹⁴ S. Malle, “The All-Russian National Front – for Russia: A New Actor in the Political and Economic Landscape”, *Post-Communist Economics*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2016), p. 200.

¹⁵ T. Stanovaya, “The All Russia People's Front: A Party with No Power?”, *Intersection*, 12 February 2016, at <<http://intersectionproject.eu/article/politics/all-russia-peoples-front-party-no-power>>.

¹⁶ U. Ehret, “Understanding the Popular Appeal of Fascism, National Socialism and Soviet Communism: The Revival of Totalitarianism Theory and Political Religion”, *History Compass*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2007), p. 1236.

¹⁷ R. Bäcker, J. Rak, “The Change of Russian Political Regime from the ‘White Revolution’ To Presidential Election (2012-2018)”, *Przegląd Strategiczny*, vol. 11 (2018).

¹⁸ Р. Бэкер, Н. Олышанецкая, “Партийные боевые группы в России”, *Політичне життя*, no. 1 (2019).

party fighting-squads operate beside powerful institutions belonging to the ruling group. Each of them pursues the goals of the institutional interest group, none of them is a typical party fighting-squad directly subordinated to United Russia. Regardless of the data provided on official websites, the size of these party fighting-squads is usually not very large and depends mainly on the resources intended for the recruitment of party fighting-squads or in order to carry out a given action. Except for Cossack units, they are not militarized. Thus, party fighting-squads in contemporary Russia are not and cannot become an independent institutional interest group. Furthermore, they have no possibility of becoming a political force that modifies the political regime.

The party-state apparatus was not created in Russia after 2014. However, such a possibility arose since Putin put in place the paths enabling the transformation of the Kremlin's ruling group along with the circling satellite political and social organizations. The abandonment of transformations resulted primarily from the lack of individual and collective interests. Individual strategies for social advancement or stabilization could be implemented in a completely different way. There were also no institutional interest groups keen on transforming the ruling group typical of authoritarianism into a power-state apparatus.

TOTALITARIAN POLITICAL GNOSIS

Totalitarian political gnosis is specifically extreme fundamentalist thinking. The black-and-white pattern of thinking, the besieged fortress syndrome, and the emotional mentality are brought to the extreme. The essential features of totalitarian political gnosis are the figure of an objective enemy, the pursuit of the salvation of the social world, and the imagined subject who was to accomplish this task.¹⁹ Each of these elements can occur in social reality at different levels of intensity.²⁰

The figure of an objective enemy began to appear in public discourse after the war with Georgia, but it was the most frequent in 2014, after the start of aggression on Ukraine. Then, after a long period of absence, the phrases known from the Stalinist era, such as the fifth column, traitors of the nation, and unwanted organizations start to recur.²¹ Before that, the semantic scope (also in the legal language) of the term "foreign agents"²² was significantly extended. This type of vocabulary from the Stalinist era, which made this totalitarian aspect epigonic, faded quite quickly. From the autumn of

¹⁹ R. Bäcker, *Nietradycyjna teoria...*

²⁰ J. Rak, "How to Measure Political Gnosis?..." ; eadem, "Justifying the Use of Violence: A Gnostic Deconstruction of a Political Universe", in J. Diec (ed.), *Deconstruction of Natural Order. The Legacy of the Russian Revolution*, Kraków 2017.

²¹ O. Nadskakuła-Kaczmarczyk, "'Zdrajcy narodu' – elementy gnozy politycznej w procesie demaskacji wroga wewnętrznego w Rosji", in M. Żakowska, A. Dąbrowska, J. Parnes (eds.), *Europa swoich, Europa obcych. Stereotypy, zderzenia kultur i dyskursy tożsamościowe*, Łódź 2017.

²² С. Павлова, "Национал-предатели Путина. Кто и как использует термин 'национал-предатель'", Радио Свобода, 19 March 2014, at <<http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/25302687.html>>.

2015, it did not appear in any significant public statement of Russian politicians, except for the enunciation by Ramzan Kadyrov.²³ Chechnya is a political entity within the Russian Federation with a high level of autonomy and at the same time different from others due to its proximity to the ideal type of totalitarianism.

Simultaneously, after February 2014, the pejorative epithets were in use to define Ukrainians on a large scale. In addition to the existing negative stereotypes (e.g. Ukry, Ukropy, embroideries, the gobbling fatback), new ones emerged, such as fascists, Ukro-fascists, and Banderites. Statements like “The disgusting Ukro-fascist showed his brutal face” or “Ukro-fascist Banderity” (“отвратительный укрофашист показал своё зверское обличье;” “бандеровские укрофашисты”²⁴) were quite common not only in social networks but also in official Russian media, including the official Kremlin press body, the newspaper “Rossijskaja Gazeta.” However, this type of vocabulary started to disappear moderately fast. On August 2015, the word укрофашист (Ukro-fascist) appeared in the newspaper “Rosijskaja Gazieta” for the last time.²⁵ The phrases concerning the broadly understood West are much more durable. The most commonly used, yet almost exclusively sarcastic phrase is “Western partners.” These anonymous forces of Western democracy interfere, as Putin systematically states, in the internal affairs of Russia every day.²⁶

The objective enemy was very widely defined for several months after the annexation of Crimea. The cessation of the use of Stalinist vocabulary from autumn 2014 does not mean, however, that the labeling of Russians averse to Putin has been stopped. After the outbreak of the mass anti-corruption protests in 2017, it was necessary to tone down the rhetoric and at the same time increase the intensity of the external enemy’s refutation. This primarily concerned the broadly understood West, most often defined as the NATO member states. The objective enemy category was, in this case, replaced by an unidentified, external enemy surrounding the “besieged fortress” defended by “ours.”

Apocatastasis treated as a myth of salvation scarcely occurs in Russian propaganda. The phrase “bright future” does not exist, obviously except for the memories of the movie from the perestroika period of 1986. The only reference to the great future for Russians took place on October 2018. Then, Putin said that in the event of a nuclear conflict, Russians will go to paradise, and those who use the weapon against Russia will “simply die as animals.”²⁷ For natural reasons, this kind of bright future was not approved by Russians with enthusiasm.

²³ “Кадыров: враги народа нуждаются в психиатрическом лечении”, *BBC News*, 18 January 2016, at <http://www.bbc.com/russian/news/2016/01/160118_kadyrov_enemies_opposition>.

²⁴ Н. Ермолаева, “Под Славянском расстреляли автобусы с детьми”, *Российская газета*, 12 June 2014, at <<https://rg.ru/2014/06/12/obstrel-site-anons.html>>.

²⁵ П. Лихоманов, “Басурин: Украинская армия открыла огонь по собственным позициям”, *Российская газета*, 28 August 2015, at <<https://rg.ru/2015/08/25/basurin-site-anons.html>>.

²⁶ “Путин заявил о ежедневном вмешательстве западных партнеров в дела РФ”, *МК.ru*, 29 June 2019, at <<https://www.mk.ru/politics/2019/06/29/putin-zayavil-o-ezhednevnom-vmeshatelstve-zapadnykh-partnerov-v-dela-rf.html>>.

²⁷ “Путин заявил, что россияне в случае ядерной войны попадут в рай”, *РИА Новости*, 18 October 2018, at <<https://ria.ru/20181018/1530983344.html>>.

The imagined subject is, first and foremost, Putin's myth. A thorough analysis of all 29 songs praising Putin on YouTube between 2000-2018 allows for the formulation of several conclusions. Most of the lyrics idealized Putin's social roles, usually the president and the man, the most famous one being "The Man Like Putin." Only 11 songs contained the elements of totalitarian political gnosis, with almost all (except for one) emerging after the beginning of the war with Ukraine. However, only one of them, "My Putin"²⁸ implemented the Stalinist scheme of the total unity of a leader with a nation that allows the people to achieve full universal happiness. At the same time, since 2017, along with the prolongation of the war with Ukraine and the growing public dissatisfaction with the existing political system, praise for Putin has begun to disappear.²⁹

There is, therefore, a very clear quantitative advantage of songs, but also a social reception, which idealizes the way of performing social roles implemented by Putin. A minority are songs treating Putin as the katechon, mediator or envoy of God, or finally God himself. The latter appeared mainly after the aggression on Ukraine. Putin's myth as a totalitarian imagined subject gave way to the authoritarian myth of the leader.

Totalitarian political gnosis appeared in Russia at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. It significantly expanded its qualitative scope and the range of influence after the annexation of Crimea to gradually disappear since autumn 2015. However, it never has had a dominant character. Fundamentalist thinking of various shades has proliferated incessantly in Putin's Russia.

MASS MOBILIZATION

Mass and controlled social mobilization occurred in Chechnya on a general scale, and a smaller scale in the other North Caucasus republics. In Russia, people gather only to celebrate the end of World War II, which is the anniversary ritual.³⁰ Historical myths related to the victory over fascism are widely shared by Russians. This is an exceptional situation because usually other elements of Russian history evoke myths about the often opposing intensity of emotional assessments.³¹ However, the mass gathering of Russians on the occasion of the anniversary on 9 May cannot be called a manifestation of mass and controlled mobilization.

In all other cases, mass mobilization is impossible.³² This results from the already-established and prevailing adoption by Russians of the strategy of withdrawing into

²⁸ "Машани – Мой Путин", *YouTube*, 2015, at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-v6Jw9rsWCE>>.

²⁹ R. Bäcker, J. Rak, *Between Hero and Savior?*...

³⁰ "В шествии 'Бессмертного полка' участвовали 12 миллионов россиян", *РИА Новости*, 9 May 2015, at <<https://ria.ru/20150509/1063632518.html>>.

³¹ L. Jonson, "Post-Pussy Riot: Art and Protest in Russia Today", *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 44, no. 5 (2016); K. Rogov, "'Crimean Syndrome': Mechanisms of Authoritarian Mobilization", *Russian Politics & Law*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2016).

³² D. White, "Political Opposition in Russia: The Challenges of Mobilisation and the Political-Civil Society Nexus", *East European Politics*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2015).

private life.³³ Thus, in cities with at least one million inhabitants, dozens of thousands of demonstrations of support for Putin were organized, usually during election campaigns. Nevertheless, the demonstrations were at the expense of huge organizational effort and administrative and business pressure. To sum up, the social apathy typical for authoritarianism outbalanced the totalitarian mass and controlled mobilization.

BIFURCATION

While stable regimes are relatively easy to define in terms of their type, their nature is considerably more difficult to identify in the periods of instability. Stable regimes are usually, in a given moment, at one point on the classical typology extended from consolidated democracy to hard totalitarianism (the continuum determined by the anti-nomic ideal types of political regimes). In turn, unstable regimes cannot be placed on this continuum pointwise due to the highly diversified structure of the variable levels of the political subjectivity created by the great social groups.

The Russian political regime was very stable until March 2017. It was then that mass anti-corruption demonstrations took place, significantly extending beyond the two capital cities to cities of one million inhabitants. The participants and supporters of these and the next demonstrations belonged to the younger generation. Although they were subjected to repression, in a large part, they did not return to their previous state of conformism, submission, loyalty or political withdrawal. It was impossible to return to the *status quo ante* with regard to the lack of wide political non-conformism. Thereby, in the spring of 2017, the first ellipse of bifurcation began.

The second ellipse of bifurcation began already after the presidential election together with the announcement of decisions considerably worsening the standard of living. The most significant decision was to do with the increase in the retirement age. This meant breaking the unwritten social consensus which was in force in Russia since Putin took office as president. Russians agreed to his ruling in return for improvement, or at least not the deterioration of living conditions. From the summer of 2018, the symptoms of mass social discontent are clear. In September 2018, in three regions, the candidates of the ruling group lost the governor's election. Protests against the construction of a church in the park in Yekaterinburg or the creation of waste dumps by following the opinions of experts are rather an expression of rebellion against the ruling group than the result of the desire to solve a specific problem.³⁴ Political anecdotes critical of not only Vladimir Putin or Dmitry Medvedev, but also the mechanisms of the entire system are most popular.³⁵ In comparison to the first ellipse of bi-

³³ M. Gabowitsch, *Protest in Putin's Russia*, Cambridge–Malden 2017, p. 203.

³⁴ A. Kolesnikov, "Civil Unrest in Yeltsin's City", *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 16 May 2019, at <<https://carnegie.ru/2019/05/16/civil-unrest-in-yeltsin-s-city-pub-79169>>.

³⁵ "Анекдоты из России" (Russian Anecdoteage), *Anekdot.ru*, 2019, at <<https://www.anekdot.ru/last/anekdot/>>.

furcation, over the second ellipse, the political subjectivity of the great social groups significantly increased. Furthermore, these groups, politically subjectified to a lower or higher extent, started covering new areas. While during the first ellipse, political subjectivity, mainly on the level of articulation and self-organization, was by young and educated people from big cities, over the second ellipse, the mass refutation of the system is typical mainly of the most open regional communities (e.g. Primorsky Krai with the capital in Vladivostok).

The third ellipse of bifurcation seems to be inevitable and at the same time very difficult to predict. It is hardly feasible to predict whether it will be the last or the next. One may define not only the scope but also the level of political subjectivity of Russian society, but it is impossible to clearly identify the type of subjectivity. The political views of the leaders of the protest movements are usually very general and internally diversified in terms of political ideas (the Navalny case).³⁶ In addition, while some movements are leaderless, in others a leader is unknown. An even more difficult issue is to determine the ways of political thinking and the types of self-organizational potential of the self-subjectifying social groups. Although it is easy to classify the level of refutation of the political system, it is difficult to determine the positive program. The Russian political regime was authoritarian during the bifurcation period, but due to the very high level of changeability of the situation, we should avoid formulating far-fetched conclusions on the precise place of Russia on the continuum determined by antinomic ideal types of authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

CONCLUSIONS

Until the spring of 2017, the Russian political regime took the form of hard military authoritarianism with the elements of nostalgic totalitarianism. These elements were the most significant to the system change in the period from March to the autumn of 2015 (from the annexation of Crimea to the military intervention in Syria). Nonetheless, the institutional paths of the transformation of the state apparatus as well as the “lagging organizations” around the first-type party of power have not been used. The semantic phrases characteristic of totalitarian political gnosis have also disappeared. Apart from small groups, mostly retirees and people associated with power structures, there were no attempts to increase the level of controlled and mass social mobilization. The only totalitarian elements that remain are epigonic since they are the result of historical policy. The mythologization of the role of Stalin as a good host and creator of the empire serves statist purposes. However, simultaneously, it contributes to the mythologization of a totalitarian Soviet-type regime, especially the patterns of its working.

The political bifurcation has taken place in Russia since the spring of 2017, and thus the subjectification of ever-wider social groups is beginning to become clearer. Due to

³⁶ O. Nadskakuła-Kaczmarczyk, *Kapitał polityczny opozycji antysystemowej w Rosji*, Kraków 2019.

the considerable level of spontaneity, their contextualization, and limited articulation, it is impossible to determine the type of political subjectivity. This impreciseness makes the formulation of the definition of a political regime much more complicated than it is in the times of regime stability.

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