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Putin – Democracy in Making

Democracy in the West has been long in making and we cannot point on a single person in any of the countries whom we would credit for having brought about democracy. We can only look at a long, and troublesome, history of social competition which has resulted in a state of affairs we call *democracy*, through wars and killings, scandals and murders, economic progress followed by economic collapse, technological progress, and spreading of free speech and its suppression and manipulation. These and other conditions, through a bloody history of hundreds if not thousands of years, brought about the conditions for democratic competition that the West now enjoys (but less so today than a couple of decades ago).

In Russia the history has been quite different. After the years of the Communist command system which destroyed all normal traditions of social interaction, Russia had to start *from scratch* to build democratic traditions for itself. In fact, saying that Russia started from scratch is a gross understatement, for after the government of the inept chatterer Gorbachev the country was in ruins and Russians had to start building a free society not from zero but with a huge handicap. Gorbachev's limited economic reforms did not serve any meaningful purpose and only created the conditions for criminal gangs and *vory* to take over the economy and soon the political power as well.

It was up to Yeltsin to start to get the country in order, but he came too late. Gorbachev's perestroika had already transformed the country into a total criminal anarchy. Without more than a handful of honest and trusted people around him Yeltsin could not achieve much in those conditions of anarchy and virtual civil war. But according to the western propaganda, this period of the 1990's is referred to as *democracy*, which supposedly was then destroyed by Putin. They brashly claim that Putin has "systematically dismantled" the democratic institutions of Russia, parliament, political parties, free election, media, and the courts. This is a big lie, or a naïve misunderstanding at best. Misunderstanding about what is the nature of democracy, about the recent history of Russia, and the nature of a Communist society.

Most fundamentally this criticism of Putin is based on a glorification of the Soviet Communist system. As if it would have served as a fundament for building a modern democratic society, just by way of some well-intentioned political decisions over the course of a few years. No. The work on building the democratic institutions only started with the fall of USSR. – These people think that the switch from the Communist USSR to the work on creating a democratic market economy of free Russia would be comparable to the change of ruling party in an established Western country. Say the UK, where a Tory Party comes in with its agenda after the Labor Party, or vice versa, making some decimal changes in the laws and government, which details the whole society publicly discusses with great interest. Hence, the ideas that Putin's 12 year in power in Russia would be a long time for achieving paradise upon earth. - And who can

seriously claim that the institutions that took thousands of years to emerge in the Western countries would have been ready to use in the few years of Yeltsin's rule? The more when we know what criminal anarchy reigned during these years? Yes, Yeltsin began to develop them, and we lift our hats to his memory for this work. But it is only under Putin that they have developed to acquire the structure of real democratic institutions. The work is not finished yet, as we can see. And now, encouraged by the early success, Putin has announced further steps on consolidating the democratic competition in Russia.

The absolutely indispensable step to create the conditions for democracy was to finish with the criminal anarchy and the rule of the oligarchs. This inevitably meant a limitation of showcase democracy in favor of trusting the job of architect of democracy to the popularly elected president. This is what the Russian people did. They gave a *carte blanche* to Putin to bring order and create a democratic market economy. And Putin has delivered on that promise. With a renewed mandate on March 4 he will continue this work, now already from a solid base.

In the 1990's there were no free elections. No conditions for such existed. The elections were a business for criminal gangs, oligarchs and political prostitutes, fraudulent maneuvers to have them appointed in various state organs by way of force, manipulation, money, media distortion etc. Most notoriously this was the case in regards to the regional governors, who ruled their subjects as feudal lords supported by the criminals, and being such themselves (with a few exceptions, perhaps, but I have not been told whom these exceptions could possibly be). In addition to ending the impudent rule of the oligarchs, the abolishing of the direct election of governors was the most important step towards building the conditions for ending the anarchy and bringing real democratic competition to Russia.

It is only under Putin that a free media has emerged in Russia. But according to the American propaganda organization Reporters Without Borders, the state of press freedom is dismal in Russia. They ranked Russia 142nd out of 172 countries just before Gambia, and preceded by such beacons of liberty as, for example, Zimbabwe (117), United Arab Emirates (112), Northern Cyprus (102). If Russia were in reality almost last in the list, then it would only mean that there are no problems with freedom of press in the world in general, for such is the level of freedom in Russia. Test for yourself, go any day and pick a random sample of the newspapers at sale on a Moscow newsstand. Plurality of opinion in all and most of them highly critical of Putin. The rankings themselves, courtesy of this propaganda organization, are regularly published in all the Russian press fresh as they appear, which is, to say the least, a great paradox. The blatant fraud in these rankings serves as strong evidence about all the other more sophisticated propaganda attacks against Russia.

What about the courts? There was no independent judiciary in the Soviet Union, and not even a system of law in a proper sense, just an arbitrary system of meting out punishments. All this was subject to a complete change in the new Russia of Yeltsin (but no steps were made under Gorbachev's *perestroika*). But this is only when the work started on building the normative base for law and taking the first steps to form an independent judiciary. Only a little was achieved under Yeltsin's presidency. The economic hardships meant that judges did not get a pay that could possibly sustain their living thus directing many of them towards the temptation of corruption (under Putin the salaries of judges have increased almost 6 to 10-fold). The laws were new and traditions non-existent. So the critics are totally wrong to say that Putin has supposedly

destroyed the independent judiciary, for there was no such thing prior to Putin coming in power. The judiciary is still underdeveloped but great strides forward have been taken thanks to the improved economic conditions and stability provided by Putin. The judiciary does not only have to be independent of the state, which it in Putin's Russia largely is, but also independent of criminal corruption and based on solid traditions, which can only emerge by time.

In his election campaign Putin is promising a number of liberal changes to the economic laws and laws governing the political system. Some of the changes are considered radical and the critics argue that Putin is not to be trusted because he has already been 12 years in power and could have done the changes earlier. But the changes are not radical compared to the dramatic questions that Putin had to tackle during the first decade of his rule. Those were fundamental questions of the to-be-or-not-to-be of the whole statehood of Russia; questions of war and peace; questions of life and death. And he did not only conquer the difficulties but he also put in place the conditions for fine-tuning the system, which fine-tuning are for the primitively minded opposition the only democracy there can possibly be. As if you could have put a turbo engine on a horse carriage before going through all the other stages of development of the automobile.

These same reasons explain the problem of corruption. Corruption in Russia is rampant, no doubt about that, however, it is hard to believe that Transparency International is transparent and fair in ranking Russia 143rd worst corruption plagued country out of 182 countries surveyed. I know from my own personal experience running a group of companies offering law and accounting services here in Russia that it is fully possible to conduct honest and transparent business in Russia without bribing anybody. - This comment was in regards to the ranking the western propaganda has assigned Russia, not to say that corruption wouldn't be a big problem. It is, and perhaps the biggest problem in the country. But it is also the most difficult one. Corruption in Russia is deeply rooted in the Soviet economy where goods and services were hard to come by. Corruption became endemic and the normal way for trying to secure what was needed as there was no real market and no currency which you could freely earn and use. It is impossible to measure the volumes of corruption in the USSR as the topic was forbidden, no surveys or studies on it could possibly have been produced. Naturally the monetary value of it must have been much less than it is in today's Russia. This for the simple reason that as there was no private property, so big assets could not be turned around anyway. The corrupt practices were so widespread that most people engaged in it did probably not even consciously recognize doing something bad, they just did what life demanded of them to survive. Then with Gorbachev's misconceived economic reforms these corrupt practices very taken to new heights. This is how the more brazen and criminal bent "businessmen" made their fortunes. During the years of anarchy in the 1990's nothing was done about the problem, the virtual civil war consumed all the energy of the government. Almost no one was convicted for any kind of economic crime, and being investigated for corruption only lead to sharing the spoils with the investigators.

It is only in the last few years, two or three, that the fight has started to yield results. And today we can almost every week read about a new high profile corruption case. Why only now? 'Why has Putin done nothing earlier?' someone asks? Well, simply for the reason that earlier there was no state power in the country that could possibly have taken on the problem. Putin took over a country plagued by anarchy and without any central power. Most of the state apparatus were in hands of corrupt people, including the, by the western press so beloved, "freely elected

governors,” the police, the prosecutors; and you could count in even a great deal of the parliamentarians. It is only now through a lot of work that escapes the lazy mind that Putin has been able to muster a response. So the reply to the ‘why not earlier’ is simply that the problems to tackle have been too enormous for such a short time. There is no doubt that during the next four years we will see a significant improvement in this regards, thanks to the continuing trust in Putin by the overwhelming majority of the people. But not much can be achieved before those who shout on Bolotnaya first start paying their taxes, demanding that their suppliers pay, and stop bribing the staff at kindergarten, schools, and hospitals.

Putin has already announced significant liberalization of the election laws, among them the proposition to further lower the threshold for registering parties with nationwide status. (We will probably never see a similar liberalization of the corresponding US laws, a country where two parties share the eternal monopoly to power. Similar business monopolies are broken up by the anti-trust laws, why don’t apply the same principle to these parties that steal the vote in the USA). Thanks to the political reforms that the Government has announced all those competing opposition leaders will soon have a chance to form their own parties by way of collecting the signature from 500 friends instead of the 40,000 needed today. I admit that this is a display of Putin’s political genius. Then each of the much touted “opposition leaders” will have the chance to form their own private pocket parties. Let them compete!

I predict that Putin will go down in history as one of the greatest leaders of all countries and all times.

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