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Corruption-oriented model of governance in contemporary Russia

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ABSTRACT

This article reveals Russian paradox: the combination of high level of corruption with strong and relatively effective government. In the focus of attention lies the examination of relations between the corruption and the processes of socio-political transformations of the end of the XX – beginning of the XXI centuries and the particularities of the corruption integration into the government of Russia. Basing upon the concept of the corruption as a political and administrative rent the author arrives to the conclusion about the formation of the corrupt model of governance in Russia. The article analyses factors which give relative efficiency to the Russian model of corrupt governance as well as the costs and contradictions of it. The author also reaches the conclusion that corruption-oriented model of governance is prospectless and makes a point that effective anti-corruption measures in Russia can be carried out only in case of current regime change and consequent realization of democratic, market and administrative reforms.

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1. Introduction

Traditional concept of corruption is related to degeneration and decay of public institutions. Nowadays high level of corruption unalterably associates with weak and ineffective government. Such conception of corruption impact is true for most cases. However, in some countries an it could be find a combination of widespread corruption with relatively efficient government. Cases like that are of particular interest to research. The case of contemporary Russia demonstrates mentioned combination of high level of corruption with strong and relatively effective government.

Phenomenon of corruption in Russia is examined fairly well regardless to its objectively closed nature. There are detailed releases of socio-cultural and historical premises of corruption (Afanasyev, 2000; Kordonsky, 2000; Shlapentokh, 2007). On the basis of empirical observations are examined different instances of corruption, and how corruption is perceived by the public opinion (Satarov, 2013; Bondarenko et al., 2013; Tavokin et al., 2014; Klyamkin and Timofeev, 2000). There are also traced political and administrative premises of corruption (Shlapentokh, 2003, 2013; Rimsky, 2004; Rimsky, 2011; Holmes, 2012). Certain aspects of corruption are analyzed in detail (Holmes, 2008; Cheloukhine and King, 2007; Olimpieva and Pachenkov, 2013; Grigoriev and Ovchinnikov, 2008; Larsson, 2006). And at the same time, Russian paradox of combination of wide-spread corruption and relatively effective government remains still unanswered. Interpretation of corruption prevails in most research either as an ordinary deviation or as an eternal attribute of Russian state and society. The matter of corruption relation to the socio-political transformations of the end of XX – beginning of the XXI centuries and its specific integration into contemporary Russian government did not receive adequate attention in academic literature.

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However, these issues are the principal ones to understand the problem of corruption in contemporary Russia. It is no secret that corruption existed also in the USSR. It took different forms being a part of unofficial privileges of the Communist Party and Soviet government elite, an element of shadow economy and also a mean to solve numerous problems of ordinary citizens in their relations with the state. (Voslensky, 1984; Ledeneva, 1998). The whole picture of the country's corruption was determined by political and socio-economic particularities of the system, and despite its widespread use it had relatively moderate scale in comparison with the contemporary Russian corruption. New corruption emerged in Russia as a result of radical political and economic reforms of the beginning of the 1990s. At this time appeared the forms of corruption prevailing also at the present day: kickbacks, one-sided contracts, political patronage, combining position in business and in politics, or conflict of interests. That corruption stems from incompleteness and failure of market and democratic transformations. It forms a basis for relations in specific Russian model of crony capitalism. Because of the prosperity of such corruption Russia has joined the ranks of the most corrupted countries of the world (Transparency International, 2013). Due to political and economic factors the development of Russia in 90-s was in accordance with the classical Third World country scenario: growth of corruption and weakening of government. But in 2000-s the paradigm of development changed cardinally: the growth of corruption began to combine with the government strengthening. Government competence to use its power functions increased considerably. Nevertheless, corruption as a result of that wasn't eliminated and wasn't even reduced, but rather it had strengthened. The new authoritarian regime had integrated the corruption as one of its key pillars. Thus the corruption-oriented model of governance was settled in Russia.

The most adequate research methodology for such model of governance seems to be the theory of rent-seeking (Tullock, 1967; Buchanan et al., 1980; Tollison, 1997; Mueller, 2008) which explains political and economic motivation and the mechanisms of non-market profit making as a pressure on the government authorities and participation in politics. Revenue from the corruption is seen as rent in the sense that it is an artificially created rent, possible in conditions of poor government control, bureaucratized economy, dishonest public officials etc. Voluntary rent expropriation leads to degeneration of public institutions. But centralized control and rent distribution may become a base for the strong authoritarian government. Therefore, the theory of rent-seeking helps to explain the combination of high level of corruption and relatively strong government which even may be notable for some effectiveness. Usage of this methodological approach in given article allows to understand rightly Russian corruption phenomenon, and it provides also further insight to the true inwardness of the contemporary Russian government.

2. Formation of the corruption-oriented model of governance

The origins of contemporary Russian problems with corruption are closely related to the destruction of the Communist government system. For sure, the collapse of the Communist dictatorship and Soviet Union dissolution were positive phenomena. These facts gave new opportunities to the development of the Russian society. Political and economic reforms of the President Boris Yeltsin were called to break off the connections with the past and to promote formation of the democratic state and market economy in Russia. But at the same time, such far-reaching changes in political and economic areas not nearly reached the stated goals posing among other things persistent problems with corruption.

In political sense new Russian democratic state was built on the ruins of Soviet political and administrative institutions. Former authoritarian government and administrative institutions were irretrievably destroyed, and, which is more, under no circumstances they could function effectively in a democratic society. New democratic institutions were developing with great difficulty. Major complications were related to the creation and adequate functioning of the institutions of democratic control over work of the public officials. Under such circumstances politicians and public officials had almost unlimited freedom to use their offices and authority the latter implied for enhancement of their own self-interests.

In economic sphere market relations were implemented within extremely bureaucratized frame of planned economy. It was necessary to create new rules for every aspect of economic life. Under old Soviet regime the government and diverse institutions that controlled economic functions turned out to be absolutely unadapted to changed reality, while new institutions were just under formation. In the context of total absence of legal clarity the process of wide-scaled redistribution of state property began. Within this framework politicians' and public officials' personalistic decisions assumed great economic significance.

On the whole, political and economic transformations, overlapping and inconsequent reforming gave rise to great opportunities for rent-seeking (Hellman, 1998). Transitory transactions between regulated and unregulated sectors of economy brought huge profit (Aslund, 2002). All important aspects of economic life – business setting up, obtaining permits and licences, property privatization, corporate restructuring and others – could not be conducted without politicians' and public officials' permission and assistance. Almost every significant money holdings in Russia were obtained with the help of political and administrative resource (Goldman, 2003; Pappé, 2000; Stepashin, 2005). Public officials created and redistributed rent by voluntaristic decisions, obtaining benefits in the forms of money, shared interest in business and other diverse types of assets.

In the second part of the 90-s Russian political leaders took some measures to normalize political and economic relations and to reduce the level of corruption. They were elaborating the ideological base of “establishing order” and continuation of liberal socio-economic reforms (Yeltsin, 1997). Personnel replacements at the highest levels of power were conducted to increase government efficiency and to strengthen technocratic tendencies in its work. It was planned to enhance transparency of state government and to lay down general “rules of game” for cooperation of the state and business, that in

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