

RUSSIA'S PERSPECTIVES BY 2025: ASPECTS DRIVING RUSSIA'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY

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RESUME

The aim of this scenario is to provide an overview of the internal situation in Russia (political regime, democracy, economy, civil society, and federalisation) as well as to analyse Russia's foreign policy by 2025. Present situation in Russia altogether with Russia's „spetsifika“ are crucial to understand and predict Russian realities in years to come. Russian style“ democracy is characterised by some aspects that make it different from Western perception of democracy (democratic standards in Russia, status quo of civil society, federalisation ,etc.). Russian political elites are often described as chess- masters in politics an this fact makes it often difficult for mutual Russia- West relations to improve. What is more, „resurgent Russia“ is seeking for new European as well as world order where its position should be shifted from its recent position of „Pluto“ in the West. The scenario also focuses on the facts that hamper cooperation between Russia and West and highlights circumstances under which mutual understanding can be reached.

Key words: Russia, democracy, civil society, political regime, Europe, federalisation, oligarchs, freedom, democracy, Soviet Union

RESUME

Cielom tejto analýzy je poskytnúť prehľad vnútornej situácie v Rusku (politického režimu, demokracie, ekonomiky, občianskej spoločnosti, federalizácie), ako aj zanalyzovať zahraničnú politiku Ruska do roku 2025. Súčasná situácia v Rusku, spoločne s ruskými špecifikami sú kľúčové pre pochopenie a predpovedanie ruských reálií v nasledujúcich rokoch. Ruský druh demokracie je charakterizovaný niektorými aspektmi, ktoré ho robia odlišným od západného ponímania demokracie (demokratické štandardy v Rusku, status quo občianskej spoločnosti, federalizácia, atď.). Ruské politické elity sú obyčajne vykresľované ako majstri politického šachu, čo spôsobuje, že je ťažké zlepšiť zložitú vzájomnú vzťahy Ruska a Západu. Navyše, asertívne Rusko sa usiluje o nový európsky, ako aj svetový poriadok, ktorom by sa zmenila jeho pozícia ako Pluta na Západe. Analýza sa

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takisto zameriava na skutočnosti, ktoré komplikujú spoluprácu medzi Ruskom a Západom a poukazujú na okolnosti, na základe ktorých by mohlo byť dosiahnuté ich vzájomné porozumenie.

Kľúčové slová: *Rusko, demokracia, občianska spoločnosť, politický režim, Európa, federalizácia, oligarchovia, sloboda, demokracia, Sovietsky zväz*

1 Russian Federation in 1990's

Political system of today's Russia is based on The Constitution of the Russian Federation of 12th December 1993. According to the document, Russian Federation is the multinational people that consist of republics, territories, regions, federal cities an autonomous region and autonomous areas which are all equal subjects of the Russian Federation. Russian citizens exercise their power directly (referendum and free elections), and also through organs of state power and local self- government. State power is vested in President of the Russian Federation, the Federal Assembly (Council of the Federation and State Duma), the Government of the Russian Federation and courts of the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation is a secular state and religious associations are separated from the state. The state language is Russian language, but the republics have the right to institute their own state languages. Political regime, however, is another case. It is the way how power is exercised and how individual powers are divided to separate bodies. „Russian style“ democracy, however, is characterised by some aspects that make it different from Western perception of democracy.

Before 1989, there used to be elections, that were not competitive since Soviet citizens didn't have a substantive choice and their aim was to legitimize one candidate party, to applaud it. In 1989, however, Congress of People's Deputies was introduced and we can observe some democratic procedures that opened the gate for so call „transformational era“. At those times this body served to bureaucrats and „nomenklatura“ and hampered the economic transformation of the Soviet society. Only in 1990, step towards democratisation and completely free elections were taken when Russian Congress of People's Deputies was established. It was party „Democratic Russia“ led by **Boris Yeltsin** (opponent of **Mikhail Gorbachev**, Secretary General of Soviet Communist Party at those times) that won the elections and **Boris Yeltsin** so gained the biggest legitimacy to govern as no one before him in Russian history.

Straight after, **Boris Yeltsin** had to face two coup d'états in 1991 and 1993 that eventually led to dissolution of the RCPD by Decree No. 1400. This presidential decree, however, was rejected by the RCPD and the Congress attempted to impeach first Russian president. Boris Yeltsin with military support won „non-elegant“ victory over it and strengthened his position with brand new political regime in Russia. What followed is confidentially known- wild privatisation of state enterprises, birth of oligarchs, raised level of criminality as well as separatist tendencies of some of Russian regions. In 1990's thus we can find roots of nature of Russian political regime of today.

From those times, Russian anti-reform decision-makers gain the experience that centralisation of power is best alternative for the Russian Federation, not „the anomaly that Russians should fight with.“¹

2 Putin's era and President Medvedev

After more than decade it is obvious that transformation and decentralisation period during Yeltsin's presidency interrupted continuity in Russian's history characterised by strong central government dominating all spheres of society. Transformation of state and society received a label of instability connected with chaos and poverty. Privatisation become for many ordinary Russians the synonym of „piratisation“. Without any exaggeration we can assume that Russian society was hungry for unexceptional leader- and that is how the legend of czar in Kremlin revived and phenomenon of **Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin** raised.

Many of analysts agree upon the fact that Mr. Putin, Russian president to be, has been endowed by the virtue of appearing ordinary but at meantime, this personal characteristics didn't prevent him from becoming „man of his time“². He was able to cultivate his specific charisma (comparable only to **J. V. Stalin** at his times) to such an extent that it paralysed all his political rivals. Mr. Putin „reinterpreted standard themes and brought presidential revolution instead of democratic“ (Lo, 2003).

First of all, Vladimir Putin as a new president started with consolidation of power- that's is why „Putin's era“ is often called years of consolidation apart

¹ As Vladimir Putin stated in 1999

² Altogether with e.g. **G.W. Bush**, **Tony Blair** or **Gerhard Schroder**, but apart from e.g. **Boris Yeltsin**, **Bill Clinton**, **Helmut Kohl** or **Francis Mitterand**.

form Yeltsin era or years of transformation. His administration strengthened rule of law to the extent to be able to be an instrument for the administration and Putin himself. Recentralisation of power was so undertaken through „dictatorship of law“ seated in Kremlin castle in Moscow. Putin's political regime is built on two essential pillars: neo-patrimonial concept and patronage-client relationship. Neo-patrimonial concept can be explained as a system in which redistribution of property takes place according to the wishes of central administration and to loyal officers, entrepreneurs. Patronage-client relationship stems from well-used principle from Soviet era meaning that contacts are more than money and wealth. The term 'Kremlin Inc' describes a tiny group for whom a 'class loyalty' based on self-interest is far more important than often artificial policy differences (Lo, 2003). This system, however, can be also characterised as a fragile one since it has not anchored stable rules for transition of power so far.

At the end of 1990's, several tens of people became very rich due to Yeltsin administration. It was mutually beneficial trade between them and **Boris Yeltsin** that secured President satisfactory political support and brought them immense wealth. Since beginning of new decade, however, **Vladimir Putin** as a new president started to limit influence of individual Russian entrepreneurs, so called *oligarkhs*, to secure own political power and eliminate potential rivals. It was beginning of new era of economic centralisation in Russia.

Political recentralisation rested upon limiting of power of regional governors- again, it was concept of „*czar and boyars*“ that was used to justify steps of Kremlin administration **Vladimir Putin**. Concrete justification was picked up from unprecedented terrorist acts in early 2000's. After Beslan tragedy in Chechnya in 2003 Putin's administration approved that regional governors of 83 provinces of Russian Federation would no longer be elected by population of the regions, but rather designated centrally from *Kremlin*. The argument was that central government could serve more effectively and more adequately for the sake of national security. By spreading fear and consciousness of danger, Putin's administration was able to raise its power despite the fact that scandals like Kursk submarine disaster, the Dubrovka theatre siege and the Beslan massacre unveiled great incompetence of national authorities.

Very effective mechanism of recruitment of people to administration, confidentially known from previous Soviet era, found its place in „brave new Putin's political regime“ as well: elections held were formally democratic,

however, their only purpose was to recruit new people from party United Russia for nomenklatura from „wide and deep pool“ of loyal people. Although it may sound cynically, in Kremlin ruled the consensus that „the outcome of elections is too important to leave voters to decide“ (Reitschuster, 2006).

Since election of **Dmitry Medvedev** in March 2008, Russia has been experiencing unprecedented status quo in its history. *Operation Successor* was literally successful- in general elections, Russians listened to Putin's desire and demonstrated high support for their incoming leader, Mr. Medvedev. Meanwhile, Mr. Putin³ still enjoys the highest popularity of all leaders in entire Russian history. Unprecedented situation is then based on following question: will cooperation between the current President and Prime Minister of Russia turn into competition? Present two poles of power, often called *tandemocracy*, *duumvirate* or *diarchy*⁴ contradicts long- century tradition of monocentric power in Russia.

When **Boris Yeltsin** left the presidential office, he left forever with almost lowest popularity possible. On the other hand, **Vladimir Putin**⁵ handled the Kremlin office at the peak of his popularity and it is then questionable if his popularity is now not an obstacle for Medvedev in gaining authority.⁶ Medvedev will have to prove himself independent and exceptional man to preserve authority of the presidential office. Otherwise it is highly probable that Vladimir Putin will be returning to presidential office very soon.

3 Russia in 2025: what is beyond?

So how will Russia look like in 2025? We are convinced that pretty much like during Putin era. When **Vladimir Putin** finished his second consecutive presidential term last year, he left Kremlin without any obvious attempts to run for presidency again. One could argue that it was a smart decision to prove that decision makers in Russia and especially Putin are gradually honoring the commitments made to the Council of Europe or to entire West (including United States). Consequently, statements and practical steps towards „rule of law

³ Occupying the post of Prime Minister of the Russian Federation

⁴ Using very appropriate Roman imperial terminology

⁵ Serving two consequent terms in presidential office

⁶ Although close relations between Mr. Medvedev and Mr. Putin last from times of their common work in office of Saint Petersburg Mayor, the fact that Dmitry Medvedev doesn't belong to „siloviki“ structures favors Vladimir Putin, former officer of Russian intelligence services.

government“ made by President Medvedev impressed both Western powers and Russian public. On the other hand, in 2025 Russian democracy will be still in its teenage, or at least „adolescent years“.

3.1 Political regime in Russia in 2025

Probability of preserving model of tandemocracy is quite low. Since Russian leaders proved by „Operation Successor“ that they are still „building its statehood according to European practices and ideologies of the 19th century rather than the European ideas of 21st century“ (Lo, 2003), it is unlikely that the bipolar regime can persist. The most important fact that attracts political elites in Russia is that Putinism or Putin’s regime enriches them all with concrete outcomes as well as with sense of pride. It was Vladimir Putin, not President Medvedev, who returned Russia to the map of world powers and it was Vladimir Putin who was chosen the preface of magazine TIME in 2007 as the most extraordinary figure of that time.

During almost decade of being active in high politics, Vladimir Putin concluded immense amount of informal agreements that, on one hand, undermine formal institutions in Russia, but, on the other one, give him uncomparable advantage over Medvedev. The people of Russia will remember Putin as the leader who was able to improve the lives of most of the population, despite restraining of media freedoms and paralysing democratic processes. It is then highly likely that Vladimir Putin will be coming back to Kremlin very soon (soonest in 2012) and will be active in high Russian politics even after 2025.

3.2 Democracy in Russia in 2025

The old Russian proverb says that „there are no fact, only their interpretations“. In this respect, when it comes to the discussion on democracy in Russia, Russian leaders are unwilling to analyse it and rather stress „*spetsifika*“ of Russian nature: Russian Federation is a big and heterogeneous country, international financial system is anachronistic and Russia’s difficulties of any kind are of temporary nature. It is then natural that atmosphere of fear sometimes artificially created in Russia evokes the need for strong central government and strong national leader for the cost of rights and freedom of Russian’s people.⁷ Putin proved himself to be a successful figure ruling Russia

⁷ In February 2009, President Medvedev also ordered intervention against extremist groups that, according to his words, are trying to use economic crisis as a tool of the destabilisation of the country.

at home and gaining prestige for the country abroad. Dmitry Medvedev, however, has a much more difficult situation in times when prices of oil dramatically fell down, financial crisis hit Russian economy more than everywhere else in Europe, Russian currency ruble is devaluating and foreign exchange reserves of Russian Federation went down in several months from 700 billion of US dollars to only 400 billions.

An army of hundreds of thousands appeared and with support of Russian political opposition demand resolute solutions from the President. It is the time for revival of *Putinism*, both messianistic and mercantilistic (Lo, 2003) regime that could save great Russian nation from financial crisis. For the sake of preventing another „colour revolution“ in Eastern Europe- this time exactly in Russia- Russian leader, probably Putin, will further limit rights and freedoms in Russia with support of wide masses- in time of crisis, the natural instinct is to pull together.

Of course, some forms of resistance are appearing. In February earlier this year, 350 demonstrators from Russian opposition demanded early presidential elections to express its disagreement over activities of the government during financial crisis. As Mikhail Kasjanov, former Russian Prime Minister, stated, „crisis is neither financial nor economic, but deep and systematic.“ In March 2009, the largest demonstration counting up to 1000 people took place in Vladivostok calling for Putin's resignation as a Prime Minister. Other demonstrations occurred also in Samara, Saint Petersburg and Kazan. Despite the efforts mentioned above, it is hard to believe that they can profoundly shake „*Putinist regime*“ built for almost a decade with intensive support of main TV channels, orthodox church and many local vassals, officers in regional administration.

3.3 Economic situation in Russia by 2025

Speaking about Russian Federation nowadays, it is often emphasised how much is Europe or EU independent on Russia's energy resources (especially gas from Russia that warms up half of the world). But, what is important too, is the fact that Russia has not alternative to European consumers as well.

Russian representatives usually marked as „extremist“ groups the ones that are racist and radical, both political and religious, nature. Human rights fighters, however, argue that President Medvedev is trying to abuse new anti-terrorist legislature against legitimate forms of opposition, similarly to its predecessor Vladimir Putin.

Interdependence between EU and Russia, however, goes hand in hand with mutual distrust and ironically, looking for either for diversified sources of energy (EU) or energy consumers (Russia). If this dilemma will be solved by 2025 remains uncertain.

The financial crisis proved Russia's vulnerability and dependence on external world. Inflation in Russia raised up to 13%, according to President Medvedev's words 6 million of Russians lost their job. As one of the main reasons of the harsh impact of global financial crisis can be assumed the same factor that made Russian economy successful in last several years- price of oil. The actual economic budget of the Russian Federation was set up on presumption that oil will be sold at \$70 a barrel. Drop of oil to some \$40 a barrel means that budget and trade balance is dropping into deficit. By 2025 it, however, also improbable that any other country will have the capacity comparable to Russia's distribution of oil.

Strategic enterprises in Russian Federation, like Gazprom, „backbone of Russia“⁸, are still at least half- state owned, neither private, neither public, *quasi-state firms*. Nationalisation of Russian biggest companies from 2003 onwards laid bases for years, or even decades to come indicating that neo-patrimonial concept will persist. Only entrepreneurs loyal to the President and the Government will enjoy property right that will continue to be rather vulnerable. Russia's economic vision by 2025 looks then very concrete as a corporate state with flexible property rights. A side effect, however, the growing state dominance of the economy creates fertile grounds for increasing corruption.⁹ According to *Transparency International* and its *Corruption Perception Index*, Russia occupies 147th position of the countries observed: this means that principles of transparent competitive market economy will remain „in napkins“ for many years in a row. A positive element of the Russian economy could be accession of foreign investments since Russia has one of the fastest rate of growing number of entrepreneurs.

3.4 Civil society in Russia in 2025

Idea of civil society guaranteeing participation people's on public affairs has gradually become one of the basic pillars of Western style democracy.

⁸ Since the arrest of oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky in October 2003, the image of Russia as an authoritarian state and imperialist power has been anchored in western thinking.

⁹ The growing state dominance of the economy creates fertile grounds for increasing corruption.

People there have a variety of possibilities how to control public affairs as well as how to control elected officials. Activisation of people in NGO's has become both necessary and useful for opinion-making purposes in Europe and America. In Russia, however, the situation differs.

Non-governmental organisations that usually form inherent part of civil society, are in Russia considered as a suspicious subjects of foreign interests, actively financed from abroad. They are often accused of treason and undermining of the stability of regimes that should eventually lead to another colored revolution in Russia (after ones in Georgia, Ukraine, Kirghiz). This is also of the main reasons why Russian administration is from year to year stepping up the administration burden for them and relatively often arrest some of the third sector representatives for the sake of alleged public order. Newly created NGO's usually have troubles with fundraising and publicity that make for them extremely difficult to exist. It is almost a rule that only the NGOs that are speaking voices of Russian political elites, and so in some regard *puppet organisations*, are successful and able to find resources to secure their existence. Process of building up of civil society is, however, long one and in countries that are harder to reform it can take time up to several decades. About future of civil society in 2025 though we stand on sceptic positions too.

Further, status quo of freedom of speech and of media sector remains disturbing as well. According to international organisation *Reporters without Borders*, monitoring freedom of speech in 173 countries, Russian Federation occupies 141th position because of continued violence and harassment of journalists. The best case of journalist's harassment in Russia, often highlighted by Western media, is probably the slaughter of Anna Politkovska, Russian investigative journalist, who used to criticise Kremlin administration for violation of human rights in Russia and especially in Chechnya, Russian republic turbulent from time to time. Anna Politkovska was slaughtered in October 2006, but circumstances and murderers remain unclear. In February 2009, three suspicious men were released from jail according to verdict of Moscow's military court, apparently because of unsatisfactory evidence. On the other hand, week later Head of Attorney Generalship of Russian Federation, Alexander Bastrykin, stated that he is firm in his decision that three accused men were guilty.

It is difficult to predict how the Russian civil society will look like in 2025. One thing is, however, for sure: it will take years to persuade Russian decision-

making structures that plurality of views doesn't always aim to destabilize the regime and it can be beneficial both for government and entire society. In liberal competition of ideas and opinions usually wins the best one.

Last, but not least, factors both of gender equality and racial discrimination give the impression that Russian society is still too immature to be marked as fully democratic. Statistics are clear and looking up back to 2008, 122 victims of racial slaughter and 377 injured is an important challenge not only for political elites in Moscow, but also for whole society by year 2025.

3.5 Federal status of Russia in 2025

From its constitutional name, Russia nowadays is a federation with different levels of delegation of power to its 83 regions, republics, territories, federal cities an autonomous region and autonomous areas which all considered as equal units of the vast Russian Federation. According to prof. Mihkail Farukshin, federation in Russia rests upon two principles of forming federation, on territorial one and devolution. Federation in Russia as such has been developed over centuries and nowadays is characterised by top-down approach and similarity to Soviet Union scheme. In terms of last two decades, federalisation in Russia has experienced two almost contradictory tendencies, era of decentralisation (1990's during Boris Yeltsin's administration) and „re-centralisation“ or „defederalisation“ (2000 onwards during Vladimir Putin's administration).

In 2025, it is probable that federalisation in Russia will be oscilating between the opposite tendencies mentioned above again. The reasons are simple: leaders of Russia, the world's biggest country, find it hard to deal with all federal units separately, so it is natural that strenghtening of central power may be expected, bearing into mind precedent given by Vladimir Putin in 2003 when he banned the election of regional representatives. Struggle between central power and regional separationist tendencies will probably continue as well because of recent events and internal processes in Russia.

After brief war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, Medvedev's administration recognised independence of two Georgian regions, South Osetia and Abkhazia. This unprecedented step taken by Russian elites (in contrast with non-recognition of Kosovo's independence) will evolve growing pressure from different region of Russia. First and foremost, ever unstable Chechnya will be stepping up its demands towards central Kremlin administration and will

speak out louder its demands towards further autonomy. It seems also very likely that regions like Ingushia and Tatarstan¹⁰ (last mentioned is even now assertive enough to deal with Kremlin administration) will follow this path. Some analysis also highlight the fact that immense territories of Siberia, especially in Far East, are already populated by millions of Chinese and number of this minority can reach 15-20 millions people by 2020. This fact, regarding Russia's recognition of two Georgian regions, will be profoundly disturbing for Russian political elites in years to come.

3.6 Foreign and security policy

Foreign policy of every state is closely intertwined with the domestic one. Nowadays, most of the analysts from world's well-known thinks-tanks can identify several disturbing facts as well as contradictions in Russia's foreign policy. „Putin's Russia is not the paperback edition of the Soviet Union, it is a controversial project that combines the gains of Russia's capitalist revolution and the fear of democratic politics that shapes Russian political tradition“ (Krastev, 2008). In last couple of years, Russian GDP grew up constantly, but this growth is due to oil and gas prices impressive and unsustainable at the same time. Russian Federation is both a revived global power with corrupt and inefficient state institutions, it is both „more democratic but less predictable and reliable than Soviet Union.“ (Krastev, 2008).

In 2025, these moments will be still fresh as well as feeling of hurt and humiliation that stems from Western dealing with Russia after Cold War, when USA and European countries regarded Russia as defeated, not transformed enemy. Unless Russian leaders in 2025 believe in favorable story that „Russia is up, America is down an Europe is out“ (Krastev, 2008), Russian foreign policy based on using energy sources for political leverage will be expressed by combination of mercantilism and messianism. Mercantilism will be expressed in trading mutually beneficial economic relations with individual Western states to political influence in major issues of mainly European countries. Moment of messianism is a smarter one: through declarations of necessity of multipolar world, Russia is trying to lessen the power of USA and maximise its status in the

¹⁰ It is worthwhile to bear in mind also the fact that both republics mentioned have a major Muslim population.

world and its neighborhood.¹¹

For last decades, Russian political elites are trying to stay in the West and at the same time to redefine West (its economic, political and security arrangements). Mr. Sergey Lavrov proudly stated several times that Russia is a member of common European Christian civilisation and welcomes the idea of common European home, idea that initially came from Mikhail Gorbachev. But, and this is the most important moment, by 2025 Russia will be trying to build „new Europe“ through denouncing U.S. influence in Europe and supporting the idea of strong European continent with dominant powers Germany, France and Russia itself.

Relations with Russia will probably continue to be the most controversial issues within the European Union and NATO. NATO enlargement virtually doesn't threaten Russia's sovereignty at all, but, on the other hand, it constantly feeds Russia's post Cold War revisionist ambitions. Russian leaders always paint the picture of NATO as a hostile organisation instead of a partner one. By 2025 Russian leaders will be probably still continuing to misuse criticism of NATO and eventually EU as an instrument for „showing muscles“ to the world powers as well as Russian citizens from time to time. At the same time, Russia will be engaged in the cooperation with European powers and USA more and more to help them tackle global political, security and economic issues, since Russia, EU and NATO face many of the identical problems and challenges.¹²

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¹¹ Paradox is however, that in reality, Russian's foreign policy instincts are more American than European. Russia believes in power, unilateralism and hard pursuit of national interest.

¹² The proverb „Russia matters“ is vested in Russia's territory with outreach to several turmoil regions in Europe and Asia, but also in Russia's possession of nuclear weapons, membership in the UN Security Council and energy and natural resources.

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