

EDITORIAL

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Nationally Oriented Rotation of the Elites – the Most Important Condition for the Implementation of National Projects



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Abstract. In the previous issues of our journal¹ we have repeatedly addressed the problem of ineffectiveness of the Government's implementation of the President's instructions, which Vladimir Putin voiced in his Addresses to the Federal Assembly, in "May Decrees", etc. In the 2018–2024 political cycle, the main directions of state policy are implemented through 12 national projects. The comprehensive analysis of expert opinions urges us to talk about the threat of disruption of their implementation once again. The following materials analyze the essence of national projects, the dynamics of their implementation, since their adoption (2005), during V. Putin's third presidential term (2012–2018), as well as the specifics of the current socio-political situation in Russia in 2018–2019, which urgently requires a qualitative increase in the responsibility of the elites for the comprehensive achievement of the targets specified in the national projects for 2018–2024.

Key words: national projects, public administration efficiency, national interests, President.

¹ See, for example, editorials in the following issues of *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast*: vol. 11, no. 2 (2018); vol. 10, no. 3 (2017); no. 2 (26) (2013); no. 6 (30) (2013); no. 3(21) (2012).

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The history of priority national projects in Russia dates back almost 15 years: on September 5, 2005, at a meeting with members of the Government, the leadership of the Federal Assembly and members of the Presidium of the State Council, Russian President Vladimir Putin raised the question of “creating new mechanisms to improve the quality of life of Russian citizens significantly” and stressed his personal participation in the implementation of priority areas such as health, education, and housing: “During subsequent work, I ask that we focus on the said priorities. To this avail, a council for the implementation of priority national projects will be created, and I will personally supervise its work”².

Since then, **the continuity**³ of goals, objectives, key directions, policy implementation, etc. can be called one of the main features of national projects. It characterizes the state policy on the implementation of national projects as a system designed for long-term work with the appropriate formulation of specific criteria, indicators, terms, and persons responsible for their achievement.

However, this continuity also has its “weak” points such as the consistent reproduction of the practice of non-achieving the planned

² Vladimir Putin’s speech at a meeting with members of the Government, the leadership of the Federal Assembly and members of the Presidium of the State Council, September 5, 2005. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23157>

³ The priority national project “Health” (2006–2018), as well as the national project “Healthcare” (2019–2024), are aimed at reducing mortality, increasing the availability and quality of medical care and development of preventive healthcare.

The priority national project “Housing” (2006–2018) and the national project “Housing and the urban environment” (2019–2024) are aimed at increasing the affordability of housing for middle-income families (in particular, they plan to increase the volume of housing construction and mortgage lending, etc.).

The priority national project “Education” (2006–2018), as well as the national project “Education” (2019–2024), provided for the support of innovative universities, updating the facilities and equipment of educational institutions, etc.

result. Many experts – scientists and representatives of the civil society have already spoken a lot about this⁴. Many of them note that the main obstacle to the development of the Russian economy is “opportunistic behavior of the state bureaucracy and major entrepreneurs”.

The opportunistic behavior of the Russian bureaucracy has a wide-scale and deep its impact on the life of Russian society. Some of its representatives ignore the objectives of the reforms or conduct them with a focus on their group interests. This manifests itself in embezzlement of the state budget, corruption, etc... Some of the Russians who have enriched themselves over the years of reforms perceive structural and technological innovations, as well as the necessary social changes, as a potential threat to their privileged position and tacitly counteract them. **In fact, Russian business, especially large business, is refraining from solving the problems of technological modernization of the economy and its diversification. Some representatives of the Russian bureaucracy hold a similar position...**

The large scale of opportunistic behavior of large groups of the population indicate the growing inconsistency between current institutional reforms and the needs of society; under the circumstances, it is necessary to replace them... The main conclusion is that the difficulties encountered on the way to the recovery of the Russian economy arise from the opportunistic behavior of the state bureaucracy and major entrepreneurs⁵.

⁴ See, for example:

Glazyev S.Yu. National projects – illusion or reality? *Zolotoi lev*, 2007, no. 101–102. Available at: http://www.zlev.ru/101/101_52.htm;

Bashkatova A. Forgotten national projects. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2009, December 29. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/economics/2009-12-29/1_nazprojects.html; Proceedings of the final plenary session of the 17th April international conference on economic and social development, April 19–22, 2016. *Official website of the HSE*. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/news/science/181135658.html>

⁵ Vlasov F. Costs of opportunistic behavior of social groups. *Obshchestvo i ekonomika*, 2019, no. 6, p. 42.

This means that these entities “seek their own interests, ignoring the law, abusing market power and official position... in fact, they weasel out of their responsibilities to address the issues of technological modernization of the economy and its diversification”⁶.

The major power of the Russian elite is the liberal clan that serves global financial speculators against their own people and strives to return to its “blessed” 1990s... The victories of the liberal clan include the reappointment of the Medvedev Government in 2018, **the pension reform**, the VAT increase, an insane tax maneuver (that inflated gasoline prices and made its production unprofitable), and the growing discontent of society...⁷

Under these conditions, the criticism and pessimistic forecasts of experts regarding the realism of the implementation of national projects in 2019 become quite understandable (*Insert 1*)⁸.

In 2019, researchers from Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (VolRC RAS) analyzed the datasheets and expert opinions on the national projects “Demography”, “Healthcare”, “Housing and Urban Environment”, and the Comprehensive plan for the modernization and expansion of the main infrastructure for the period up to 2024. According to the results of this review, it was concluded that the measures aimed at the implementation of the goals lack financial support, that the national projects neglect a number of objective demographic and socio-economic trends, and that the quality of the used criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the activities is insufficient.

⁶ Ibidem. P. 43.

⁷ Delyagin M.G. Sobyenin's Prospects. *Gazeta “Zavtra”*, 2019, no. 32. Available at: http://zavtra.ru/blogs/perspektivi_sobyaniina

⁸ Insert 1 presents only a small part of the analyzed expert opinions, their quintessence. Nevertheless, it fully reflects the general skepticism of experts about the prospects for the implementation of national projects.

In a concise form, expert assessments are summarized⁹ in *Insert 2*. The data clearly show that before their implementation the national projects were not subject to broad, large-scale discussion either in the expert community or among the public; although this would have eliminated many of the shortcomings that arise today during the implementation of the national projects.

The expert assessments presented in Inserts 1 and 2 suggest with a high degree of probability that the practice of non-fulfillment of national project targets will be repeated, and, therefore, their essence is not so much economic and not so much political (since they are developed and implemented after the beginning of a new political cycle), but rather psychological, due to the fact that they are used as a tool of political rhetoric in the classical version of the management of crowd psychology.

The founders of crowd psychology (G. Le Bon¹⁰, G. Tard¹¹, S. Sighele¹²) at first considered the crowd only in a negative context, as a gathering of people “mostly with criminal inclinations, obsessed with harmful passions and desire for destruction; who are not engaged in any useful work and do not have their place in society”¹³. However, with the

⁹ More detailed information on the full list of expert assessments of these national projects and on the Comprehensive plan can be found in the following materials:

National projects 2019–2024: analysis and key risks to their implementation. Economic unit: scientific-analytical edition. Team of authors under scientific supervision of V.A. Ilyin, T.V. Uskova. Vologda: VolRC RAS, 2019. 93 p.;

National projects 2019–2024: analysis and key risks to their implementation. Social sphere: scientific-analytical edition. Team of authors under scientific supervision of A.A. Shabunova. Vologda: VolRC RAS, 2019. 68 p.

¹⁰ Le Bon G. *Les Lois Psychologiques de l'Évolution des Peuples* (1894); *La Psychologie des Foules* (1895).

¹¹ Tarde G. *La foule criminelle* (1892); *Études de psychologie sociale* (1898).

¹² Sighele S. *La coppia criminale* (1892); *La delinquenza settaria* (1897).

¹³ Golubeva M.V. Social masses – what it is, crowd psychology, specifics, features. Gray mass of people. *Information resource “Psychologist's advice”*. Available at: <https://psychologist.tips/2814-sotsialnye-massy-eto-chto-psihologiya-mass-osobennosti-harakteristiki-seraya-massa-lyudej.html>

Crowd psychology is a field of psychology, which studies the nature, essence, laws of occurrence, formation, functioning and development of crowds and masses as specific forms of human communities. It was created in the late 19th century by French sociologist and psychologist G. Le Bon, Italian psychologist and lawyer S. Sighele (1868–1913), etc... Traditional research subjects of crowd psychology include various gatherings of people, demonstrations, rallies, phenomena of mass euphoria, aggression, panic, etc.

To a certain extent, crowd psychology is focused on Le Bon's "psychological law of the spiritual unity of the crowd", according to which in the later phase of the formation of an organized crowd, there is a **leveling, depersonalization and deindividuation of people** in it; which is why on the basis of shared qualities managed by the unconscious a temporary "collective soul" of the crowd is formed¹⁴.

The origins of the idea of crowd psychology were laid in the theory of imitation by G. Tard, who argued that social behavior has no other explanation than through the idea of imitation¹⁵.

development of psychological science itself and, in particular, with the increased interest in group psychology, the idea of the crowd has lost its negative connotation and started to be interpreted to a greater extent more neutrally – as a "relatively stable gathering of people with its own purpose and common intentions"¹⁶ (this happened in the mid 20th century). It should be noted that this was largely facilitated by the emergence of the term "the masses", which

¹⁴ *The Newest Dictionary of Philosophy*. Minsk: Book House. A.A. Gritsanov. 1999. Available at: https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/dic_new_philosophy/993/%D0%9F%D0%A1%D0%98%D0%A5%D0%9E%D0%9B%D0%9E%D0%93%D0%98%D0%AF

¹⁵ Gadaev A.V. Crowd psychology. *Information resource "Proza.ru"*. Available at: <https://www.proza.ru/2011/12/21/502>

¹⁶ Golubeva M.V. Social masses – what it is, crowd psychology, specifics, features. Gray mass of people. *Information resource "Psychologist's advice"*. Available at: <https://psychologist.tips/2814-sotsialnye-massy-eto-chto-psihologiya-mass-osobennosti-harakteristiki-seraya-massa-lyudej.html>

became widespread in the second half of the 19th century within the framework of Marxist philosophy: the term "masses" meant "workers, that is, the people who are engaged in material production and play a decisive role in the development of society; the masses became the main force in the era of revolutions they were opposed to the ruling and intellectual elite"¹⁷.

Non-critical thinking, hyperbolicity of thinking; ignoring the facts; simplicity and emotionality of perception; respect for power and the need for a leader – all these and many other regularities of crowd psychology allocated by the classics of this research area are fully present in our country today.

"The images that strike the imagination of the crowd are always simple and clear. Not the facts themselves amaze the crowd, but the way they are presented to it... The crowd does not think or consider. It is capable of perceiving only those ideas that are simplified to the limit. The judgments of the crowd are always imposed upon it, and are never the result of a comprehensive discussion. The crowd never seeks the truth. It turns away from any evidence it does not like, and prefers to worship delusions and illusions, provided that it likes them"¹⁸. "The masses are easily manipulated and gullible. The person who would wish to take advantage of the masses would do best not to employ reasonable arguments but propose, rather, fascinating visual images which they should repeat again and again. The masses fall under the truly magical power of words"¹⁹.

Isn't it true that all these long-studied characteristics are extremely suitable for describing the modern relationship between society and power? They fully explain, for example, why at peak moments (no doubt,

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Starikov N. Nine quotes by Gustave Le Bon. *Official blog of N. Starikov*, 2016, January 7. Available at: <https://nstarikov.ru/blog/61667>

¹⁹ Freud S. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Moscow: Sovremennye problemy, N.A. Stollyar, 1926. Available at: <https://www.magister.msk.ru/library/philos/freud001.htm>

Insert 1

Evaluation of national projects by Russian experts

Expert	Assessment / opinion	Source
E.S. Gontmakher (Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor, Lomonosov Moscow State University)	<p>National project "Healthcare"</p> <p>"Even 3.6% of GDP is an extremely low level of public spending on health according to world standards. In the member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in which we recently wanted to enter, this share is 6.5%, and in countries such as Germany, France, the United States – even more. Under the circumstances, it is not very believable that ambitious goals to reduce morbidity and mortality of the population, to increase (almost four-fold, compared to 2017) the export of medical services will be achieved".</p>	Why trillions of spending on national projects do not improve the situation. <i>Ekho Moskvy</i> . 2019. April 9. Available at: https://echo.msk.ru/blog/openmedia/2404337-echo/
V.M. Simchera (Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor, Honored Scientist of the Russian Federation, member of the Izborsk Club) P.V. Kalitin (Doctor of Sciences (Philosophy), Professor) V.V. Aveyanov (Doctor of Sciences (Philosophy), Director of the Institute for Dynamic Conservatism, member of the Izborsk Club)	<p>National project "Education"</p> <p>"The very preamble to the passport of the national project "Education" contains the contradiction, the conflict between upbringing and education: "the upbringing of a harmoniously developed and socially responsible personality" is proposed to carry out "on the basis of moral and spiritual values of the peoples of the Russian Federation, and historical and cultural traditions"; education, in contrast, will be based on the principles of "global competitiveness" and "entry of the Russian Federation in the list of 10 leading countries according to the quality of general education" ... Here we can see the fallaciousness of the very philosophy of this project, and the officials are guided by this very philosophy. Whether by inertia, whether intentionally, they continue to use a false quantitative and rating approach to the good things previously laid in the whole system of public administration".</p>	Simchera V., Kalitin P., Aveyanov V. At the break of generations. Human "capital" or human "ballast"? Available at: http://zavtra.ru/blogs/na_izome_pokolenij
A. Ulyanov (economist, social activist, expert on antimonopoly and demographic policy)	<p>National project "Demography"</p> <p>"Many of the measures proposed in the national project "Demography" resemble attempts to wipe the floor under a leaking roof, instead of repairing the roof... The national project does not say a word about the mortality of working-age population... Besides, the national program does not say anything about abortion: in Russia, one hundred thousand signatures were collected in favor of removal of abortion from the compulsory medical insurance, and only three thousand – against it. It is nonsense that taxpayers' money continues to be spent on this operation, especially when the country is facing a demographic crisis".</p>	Will the national project "Demography" solve the problem of fertility? <i>Online magazine "Yelitsy media"</i> . Available at: https://media.elitsy.ru/novosti/nacionalnyj-proekt-demografiya-reshit-problemy-rozhdaemosti
D. Kiris (Deputy Chairman of the Commission of the Civic Chamber for the Development of Culture and Preservation of Spiritual Heritage, head of the Board of the Interregional Independent Trade Union of Theater and Film Actors)	<p>National project "Culture"</p> <p>"... The project provides for regional co-financing, which often does not exist at all. And in general, the primary issue concerns the effectiveness of spending in the regions... for such a huge country as Russia, 11.35 billion is not the amount that can fully solve all pressing issues and conduct a serious reconstruction with repairs and re-equipment".</p>	The main problem for the National project "Culture" is the regions. <i>Kulturomaniya website</i> . Available at: http://kulturomaniya.ru/column/item/denis-kiris-glavnaya-problema-dlya-proekta-kultura-regiony/
N. Kosareva (president of the Fund "Institute of Urban Economics" and head of the Commission for Housing Policy of the Public Council under the Ministry of Construction of the Russian Federation)	<p>National project "Housing and the urban environment"</p> <p>"...Four federal subprojects within the national project "Housing and the urban environment" are not balanced among themselves... So far, the quality of the urban environment has been reduced to the improvement of yard areas, parks and squares. This is not a comfortable urban environment, but some minor improvements".</p>	Experts propose to clarify the parameters of the national project "Housing and the urban environment". <i>Pravda o SRO</i> . Available at: https://pravdaosro.ru/news/yekspertypredlagayut-utochnit-paramet
A. Avdonina (Senior Researcher, Center for Economic Modeling of Energy and Ecology, RANEPA)	<p>National project "Environment"</p> <p>"...The transfer of the timing of the MSW treatment reform in 15 regions on January 1, 2020; flaws in the mechanism for collection, storage and transportation of valuable secondary resources; lack of mandatory separate storage and collection of wastes in the territorial schemes of most regions of the Russian Federation. Of particular concern is the export of MSW and construction waste from Moscow and the Moscow Oblast to regions where there is no infrastructure for waste management... Such facts cause social tension, protests, distrust in the authorities.. This can result in the opposition to the actions of the authorities in the field of waste management... which, in turn, will create obstacles to the implementation of NP "Environment" ..."</p>	National project "Environment" – tentative steps. Available at: https://www.finam.ru

Expert	Assessment / opinion	Source
D. Tsofov (expert at the ONF thematic area "Safe and quality roads")	<p>National project "Safe and quality roads"</p> <p>ONF experts studied the passport of the national project "Safe and quality roads", which was prepared by the Government of the Russian Federation. It became clear that the final edition of the document completely considered only two out of 31 suggestions – in that form and with that message that the social activists put in these suggestions. "To us at least it seems strange that the Cabinet of Ministers did not include a lot of issues in the passport of the national project; those issues were reflected in the expert proposals and are of great importance to the population. In this situation, it is not possible to solve the tasks set by the head of state".</p>	<p>The ONF will seek to include its proposals in the national project "Safe and quality roads". <i>Project of the All-Russian Popular Front "Road inspection of the ONF. The map of damaged roads</i>, November 13, 2018. Available at: https://dorogi-ont.ru/news/5730/</p>
D. Zavarukhin (Director of the Institute for the Study of Science of RAS)	<p>National project "Science"</p> <p>"...It is practically impossible to fulfill the tasks of the national project with the budget financing of fundamental science in volumes below 0.3% of GDP, and the financing of science in general from budgetary and extra-budgetary sources in volumes below 2% (RF suggests Russia should reach this volume in 2035)..."</p>	<p>Press conference of the trade union of RAS employees. RAS trade union: "We fail the national project". Available at: https://indicator.ru/</p>
V. Korochkin (first Vice-President of OPORA RUSSIA)	<p>National project "Small and medium entrepreneurship and the provision of support to individual entrepreneurial initiative"</p> <p>"...Participants of the discussion noted that in general, the business environment in Russia has not improved yet – the number of enterprises is decreasing, unemployment is growing..."</p> <p>"...In 2018, the number of workers employed in small business decreased by 200–300 thousand people or 1.5%, while we set a goal to increase their number by 1.5 million people every year. The number of small companies decreased in 78 regions..."</p>	<p>An extended meeting of the regional Council of OPORA Russia, March 22, 2019. <i>Official website of OPORA Russia</i>. Available at: http://opora.ru</p>
Assessment of the working group of the Expert Council under the government of the Russian Federation	<p>National project "Digital economy"</p> <p>"Legislative activity within the framework of the "Digital economy" does not provide for public discussion, regulatory impact assessment and anti-corruption expertise... Since most sectors of the economy will have their own plans for digitalization, the procedure for passing legislative initiatives without public discussion will be applied to healthcare, education, industry, agriculture and other sectors. The new rules also exclude the possibility of independent examination of initiatives and make the control on the part of business, society, and often the authorities impossible. Only big business and politicians will be involved in the implementation of the "Digital economy", while small and medium-sized businesses, associations and the expert community will be excluded from the process; this will expand the possibilities of manipulation for interested structures".</p>	<p>Tishina Yu. "Digital economy" gets more helmets. <i>Kommersant</i>, 2018, October 3. Available at: https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3759007 (according to the evaluation of the national project by the Expert Council under the Government of the Russian Federation)</p>
A. Veltuzhskikh (member of the Central headquarters of the ONF, a State Duma Deputy)	<p>National project "Labor productivity and employment support"</p> <p>"The project understates labor productivity indicators, which the country's industry should reach by 2024... According to the passport of the national project, in 2024, the ratio of labor productivity growth at medium and large enterprises of the basic sectors of the economy to the previous year without the implementation of the national project will be 103.2 and with the implementation of the national project – 105%. Given the position of Russia in relation to the advanced economies of the world, these figures appear to be understated".</p>	<p>ONF parliamentary newspaper proposes to revise the national project "Labor productivity and employment support". Available at: https://www.pnp.ru/social/ont-predlagaet-podkorrektirovat-nacproekt-proizvoditelnost-truda-i-podderzhka-zanyatosti.html</p>
V. Khaykov (Chairman of the Board of the National Association of Oil and Gas Services, member of the Public Council under the Ministry of Industry and Trade)	<p>National project "International cooperation and export"</p> <p>"The national project should be detailed. It contains quite long deadlines – they need to be reduced, because export tasks are critically important. It is very important that the national project provide for synchronization with regions... Financing: it is unclear how much money is allocated on a particular sphere, it is not clear how expedient such sum is; which means, we cannot estimate its effectiveness. The question concerning effectiveness: there should be key performance indicators (KPIs), the contribution of a specific task to the final result should be indicated".</p>	<p>Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, Round Table "Discussion of the national project "International cooperation and export". Available at: https://nangs.org/</p>

Insert 2

Expert evaluation by researchers from Vologda Research Center of RAS (summary)

National project "Demography":

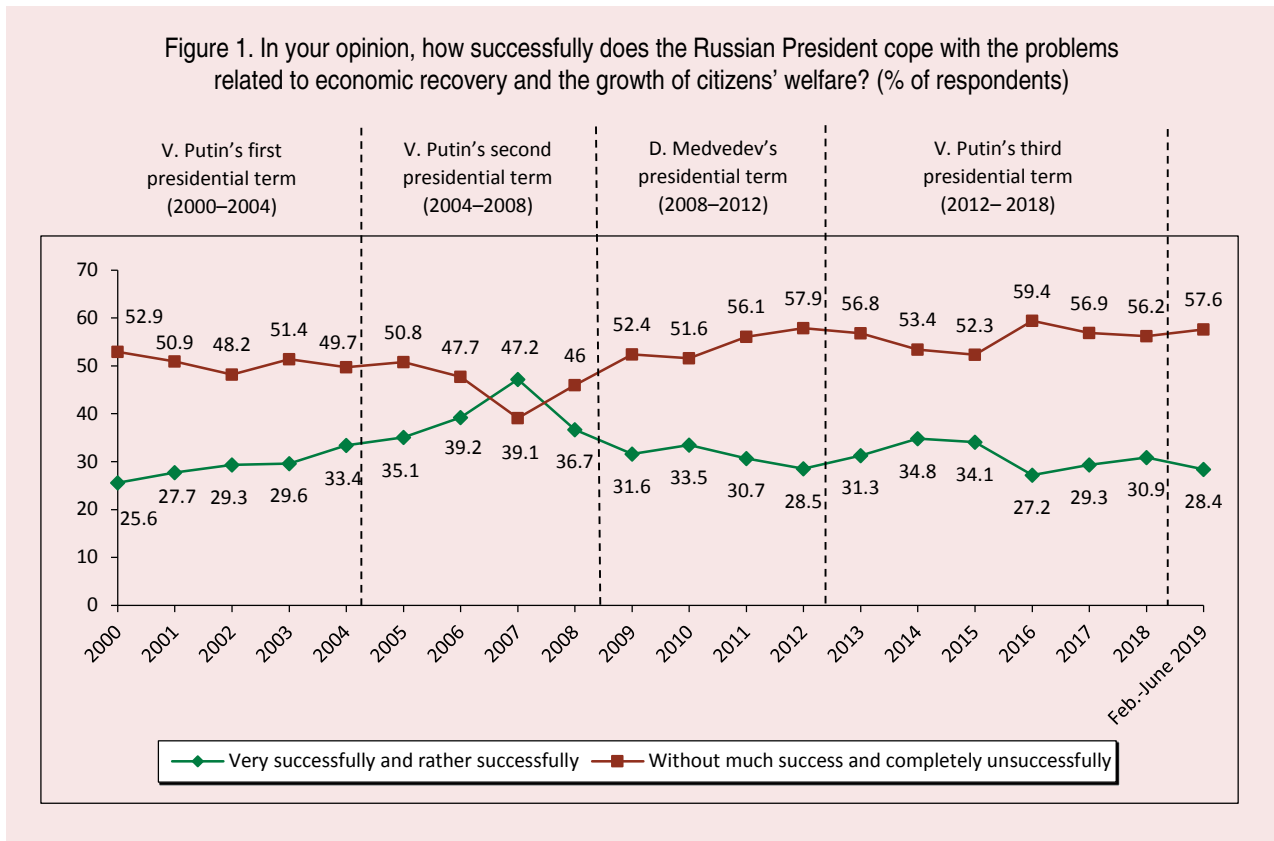
- ✓ Financial incentives to promote the birth rate affect only the conditions of implementation of the need to have children, but do not affect the very need to have children (the value component of reproductive behavior).
- ✓ The proposed measures of financial support for families with children are insufficient to produce a stable positive effect, namely to increase the total fertility rate to 1.7 children per woman by 2024. A small amount of funds is allocated to support the birth of a third and subsequent children in families.
- ✓ Opening up additional places in institutions of additional education only partially solves the problem of employment of women who are on maternity leave to care for a child up to three years. In addition, the creation of flexible forms of employment for this category of women is of great importance, but this measure is not reflected in the directions of the national project.
- ✓ The national project does not stipulate infrastructure conditions for the implementation of the direction "Organization of activities for vocational training and additional vocational education of persons of pre-retirement age".
- ✓ The "Older generation" directions of the project only partly cover the provisions of the Strategy of Actions in the Interests of Senior Citizens in the Russian Federation up to 2025; namely professional training and additional professional education of persons close to retirement age, improvement of provision of social services and health care to senior citizens. Such directions as stimulation of employment of people of retirement age; anti-discrimination policy regarding labor activity of pensioners remain ignored or they are considered insufficiently; formation of conditions for the organization of leisure of citizens of the older generation; ensuring access of this category of the population to information and educational resources, etc.
- ✓ For the purposes of monitoring the health status of the older generation, it is more appropriate to use the indicator "healthy life expectancy at the age of 60".
- ✓ Motivation for healthy lifestyle is only partially reflected in the target indicator "Number of visits to medical organizations on the issues of healthy lifestyles". It depends not only on the medical activity of a person (their visits to medical institutions), but also directly on the practices of healthy lifestyle (Giving up smoking/alcohol consumption, balanced diet, physical activity, compliance with the work and rest regimen, etc.)
- ✓ The principle of selection of regions (priority areas/not included in the priority areas) for constructing sports centers and complexes is not clear. It is unclear whether sports facilities (indoor rinks, football arenas) listed in the action plan will be built in the same or in different regions of the Russian Federation. A similar situation arises with the supply of new equipment and inventory.

National project "Healthcare"

- ✓ Inadequate understanding of the development of primary health care is often perceived as a way to reduce the cost of healthcare and minimize costs, which is not true. Primary healthcare requires investment as well.
- ✓ There is a risk of fragmentation of efforts and programs, when some areas of medical care, including for individual nosological groups, are supported and others are ignored.
- ✓ Insufficient funds laid down in the framework of the national project for the development of a network of national medical research centers and implementation of innovative medical technologies.
- ✓ Risks to information security, as well as the fragmentation of the information field, formal approach to problem solving in the creation of a single digital framework in healthcare on the basis of the unified state healthcare information system.
- ✓ There is a risk that a formal solution to the problem of developing exports of medical services, for example, the growth of exports of services only within the CIS countries, will change the real growth of the competitiveness of Russian healthcare at the international level.

End of Insert 2

<p>National project “Housing and the urban environment”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A drop in people’s real incomes for six consecutive years significantly limits the possibilities of development of mortgage market and housing demand in the coming years ✓ The project does not consider in detail the options for addressing the housing needs of the population with low income and inhabitants of small settlements. ✓ The planned rates of increasing the volumes of housing construction are difficult to achieve, since the volume of housing construction in Russia is declining for several years and in many regions it is below the level of 2014, and it is necessary to commission most of the objects (based on the cycle of their construction) in 2019–2021. ✓ The introduction of a new system of financing construction works using escrow accounts would increase the cost of housing with significant probability. ✓ It is unclear how the planned 30 rise in the price of square meter of housing in 2019–2024 will correlate with the increase in its availability to the population (even considering the reduction in mortgage rates). ✓ The national project does not propose any new mechanisms to improve the living conditions of the population (social, rental housing, etc.). ✓ The tools of state support for the utilities sector and the modernization of engineering networks have not been developed. ✓ The criteria used in the methodology do not allow us to give an objective assessment of the quality of living in the city: it does not consider important components of citizens’ life that determine the quality of life in a given settlement. ✓ Actual volumes of dilapidated and hazardous housing can be much higher due to the fact that a large number of houses are actually dilapidated, but they are currently not recognized as such. ✓ The planned indicators on improvement of living conditions of citizens lag behind the rate of increase in the number of dilapidated and hazardous housing; this fact does not help solve this problem completely. 	<p>Comprehensive plan for modernization and expansion of mainline infrastructure up to 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Insufficient coordination of the mechanism to develop a Comprehensive plan (the plan was approved in 2018, and the methodology for ranking individual projects contained in the transport part – in 2019); insufficient coordination of the projects for development of individual modes of transport with each other. ✓ Short planning horizon for the implementation of projects in the transport sphere (only 6 years); lack of pre-planning for the period after 2024 ✓ Some target indicators are difficult to achieve (e.g. Russia’s raising up 24 positions in the ranking of countries according to the freight logistics performance index). ✓ The link between transport projects and the objectives for development of economy of regions of Russia is insufficiently substantiated and elaborated. ✓ The activities aimed at implementing the Comprehensive plan (e.g. development of airport infrastructure) are not detailed clearly. ✓ More attention is paid to megaprojects to the detriment of point investment projects that can have a significant impact on the socio-economic development of regions. ✓ Risks of uneven distribution of the load on the manufacturers of building materials and the risks of their failure to satisfy requirements under the Comprehensive plan. ✓ The risk of under-disbursement of budget funds or the emergence of the need for additional financing due to the lack of information on the energy part of the Comprehensive plan. ✓ The inadequate and unclear implementation mechanism can serve as a deterrent in attracting private investment in projects implementation. ✓ The lack of detailed elaboration of the tools for the development of alternative energy, which is widespread abroad, with the prospect of its use throughout the country, not just in isolated areas.
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an election is such a moment) the President and the party in power gain a record number of votes of support, while throughout the political season there remains a high level of dissatisfaction in society concerning the way in which these very authorities implement the same policy issues related to the dynamics of the standard of living and quality of life (Fig. 1).

And just as precisely the formulation of the main goals set out in national projects (first announced in the President’s annual Addresses to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation) sounds reassuring, although more than half of Russians, according to sociological surveys, do not believe that the designated development targets will actually be achieved.

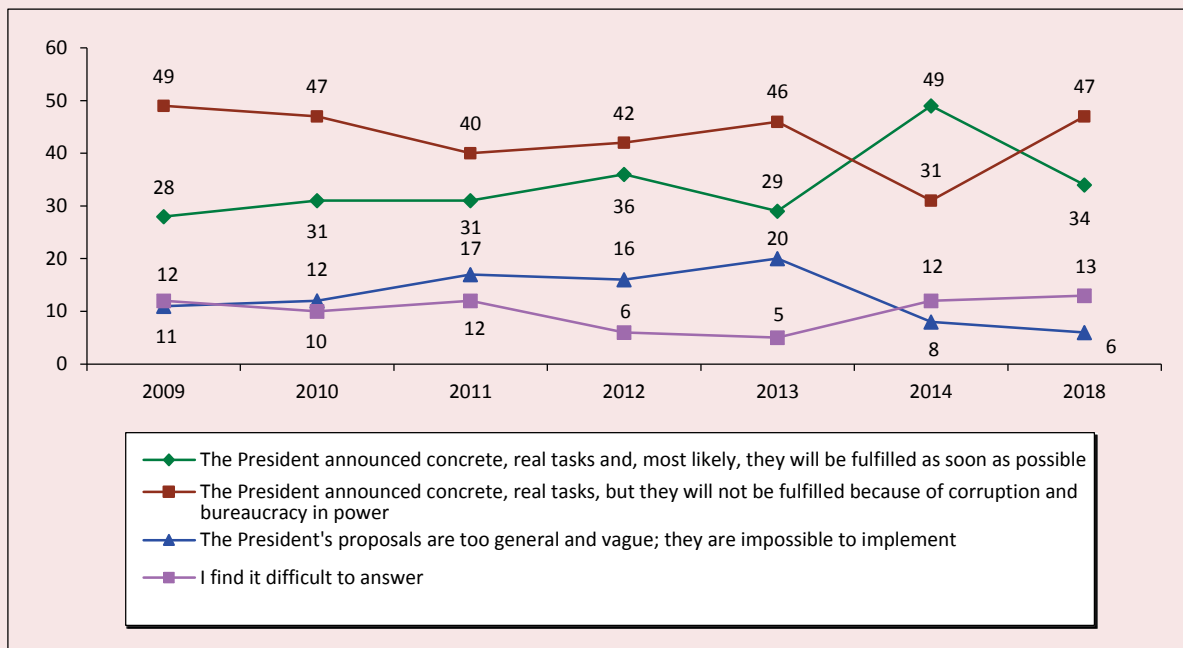
Let us recall that after the President delivered his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2018, the majority of Russians (53%) noted that the tasks he had voiced would not be fulfilled. Moreover, according to 47% of Russians, they would not

be implemented “because of corruption and bureaucracy in the government”, and only 3% said it would be due to the fact that “the President’s proposals are too general, non-specific”²⁰ (Fig. 2). According to RAS Federal Research Sociological Center, from 30 to 46% of Russians felt that the most important tasks of the Presidential Address of 2018 (increasing the average life expectancy of Russians to 80 years; increasing real incomes of working population and increasing pensions; improving the availability and quality of medical care and educational services, etc.) would not be implemented²¹.

²⁰ President’s Address to the Federal Assembly: first impressions: VTsIOM press release, 2018, no. 3602, March 13. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116743>

²¹ Filina O. Birds in the hand turned into birds in the bush: what do Russians think about the feasibility of strategic tasks of the state. *Kommersant*, 2018, May 28. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3635558>

Figure 2. In your opinion, to what extent are the tasks that the President announced in his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation realistic, and will they be fulfilled or not? (all-Russian data by VTsIOM, closed-ended question, one answer; in % of those who listened to the Address or learned its content from the news)



Source: President's Address to the Federal Assembly: first impressions: VTsIOM press release, 2018, no. 3602, March 13. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=116743>

The practice of public administration based on the laws of crowd psychology, apparently, continues to be implemented in the political season of 2018–2024. At least it is implemented by the same people who failed to achieve the goals set out in the previous orders of the President. Criticism of national projects of 2018–2024 points to the same “sore spots” as in priority national projects of 2006–2018 (insufficient funding, ill-considered evaluation criteria, etc.) and meanwhile the political system witnesses the same struggle for power on the part of various groups, which in 2012 was mentioned by experts from Minchenko Consulting Group: “The process of ruling aims primarily to sustain the existing inter-clan balance... Russian power is a conglomerate of clans and groups that compete with one another over resources”²².

²² Vladimir Putin's Big Government and the “Politburo 2.0”: a report by Minchenko Consulting. 2012. P. 2.

... Against the background of institutional proposals to modernize the system and arguments about the link between the government and the people, **Russian political history continues to degrade**. The autumn gubernatorial elections will be held in a purged competitive field – in order to guarantee the stability of the results... But another point is important. **An attempt to legitimize power in the conditions before, during and after the transit with the help of the changes in the system of public administration, but without reliance on the real interests of society, can only result in a greater gap between the elite and the people. It would be good if the changes began with the people rather than with the Constitution**²³.

Today, people may change, but the essence does not change: the political system is being “rebuilt” on the basis of the results of

²³ Skorobogatyi P. Healthy evolution of the policy. *Ekspert*, 2019, no. 30, p. 49.

“undercover games” of elite groups rather than the interests of national development and the needs of the majority of the population, and this also indicates the “continuity” of the basic principles of building relationships between society and government.

However, the inability of the political system to transform itself dynamically is in conflict with the qualitative changes that have occurred over the past almost 20 years in Russian society. During this period, society has changed dramatically: in the demographic, economic, and psychological spheres... Not all of these changes are positive, but it is important to emphasize that **the social transformations have resulted in the growth of public awareness of its own subjectivity**. Today it is reflected in an increasing need for changes²⁴, in the increase in the number of Russians who do not count on the support of the state²⁵, and in the sensitivity

Everyone was horrified by the results of the research carried out at the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences on the dynamics of the psychological state of our society, which were published in late 2013... **Over the past 30 years, all the negative traits** (permissiveness, violence, aggression, hatred, hostility, arrogance, greed, anger, cruelty, rudeness) **have aggravated in Russians, and the positive traits** (discipline, reliability, decency, humanity, kindness, compassion, selflessness, mutual respect, altruism), **on the contrary, deteriorated. So much for the difference between the two worlds – the socialist and the capitalist...**²⁶.

²⁴ Petukhov V.V. Dynamics of social mood of Russians and the formation of a request for change. *Sotsis*, 2018, no. 11, pp. 40–53.

²⁵ Gorshkov M.K., Sedova N.N. Self-sufficient Russians and their life priorities. *Sotsis*, 2015, no. 12, pp. 4–16.

²⁶ Sapozhnikova G. In 30 years Russians have become bolder, meaner and greedier (an interview with Professor S. Enikolopov, head of the Department of Medical Psychology at the Center for Mental Health Research, Russian Academy of Medical Sciences). *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 2014, September 1. Available at: <https://www.vologda.kp.ru/daily/26179.4/3068438/>

and the severity of public reaction toward various episodes of social injustice on the part of the authorities with regard to the people – from the uncoordinated construction site for a church in Yekaterinburg to the non-admission of independent candidates to participating in the Moscow City Duma election.

We should note that according to the nationwide data by VTsIOM and regional data by Vologda Research Center, the likelihood of protests and most importantly the willingness of people to participate in them have not decreased to the values that preceded the public announcement of the draft pension reform (June 2018). Twenty seven percent of Russians and 20% of Vologda Oblast residents are ready to take part in protests – these figures are not only significant and create a situation in which “violent events can often unfold”²⁷; they exceed those registered in the first years of V. Putin’s each presidential term (*Fig. 3 and 4*).

As society becomes more “mature” in the political and civil aspects, the mechanisms of influence on public consciousness that are traditionally used by the government will increasingly lose their validity, but there is no alternative to them yet.

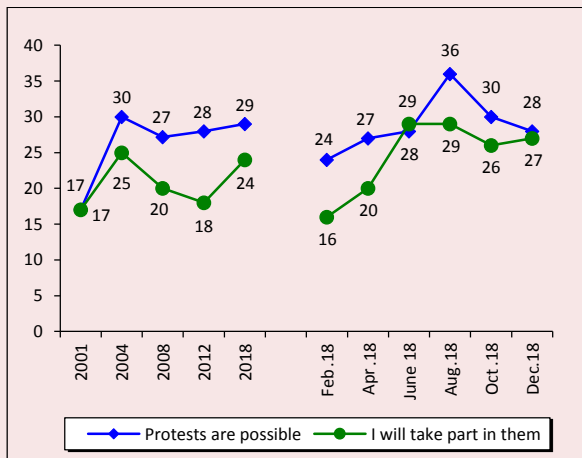
This is evidenced by the current and prospective situation in the country, which continues to degrade demographically, economically, morally and (as we can see from the increase in social tension) socio-psychologically:

✓ the demographic situation is such that only in four months of 2019 we reached natural population decline of 149 thousand people... In fact, we had such a decline in 2007. We faced similar situation twelve years ago”²⁸;

²⁷ Sheynis V.L. Historical transit: Russian drama. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2017, January 27. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2017-01-27/5_6914_drama.html (accessed: 28.01.2017).

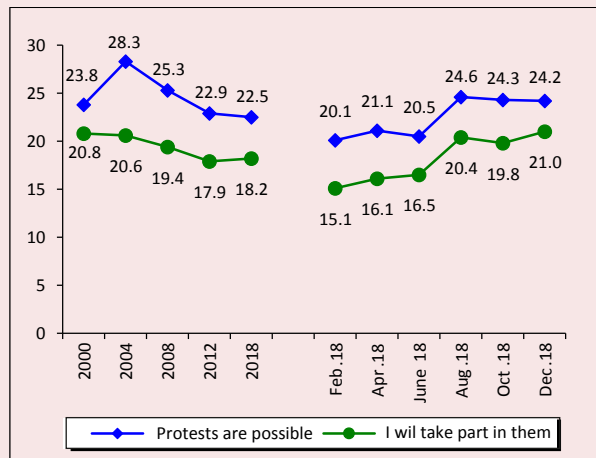
²⁸ Sysoev T. To stay alive. *Ekspert*, 2019, no. 28, p. 51.

Figures 3–4. Proportion of people who consider mass protests possible and who are ready to take part in them (% of respondents)



VTsIOM data (for Russia)

The wording of the question: "In your opinion, what is the likelihood of mass protests against falling living standards, injustice on the part of the authorities and in defense of your rights in your city/rural area? Will you personally take part in them or not?" Source: https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/protestnyj_potencial/



VoIRC RAS data (for the Vologda Oblast)

The wording of the question: "In your opinion, can mass protests against rising prices and low living standards be held in your settlement? Will you personally take part in them?". Source: VoIRC RAS database.

The most surprising thing is that now (unlike the mid-2000s), when you study poverty in Russia, you no longer feel any shock or surprise. And this indifference is dangerous, as it characterizes the usual social depression. It is not surprising, because not only the poor are poor in Russia, but virtually the entire Russia is poor. Median monthly income in many regions of the country is only 250–300 USD. According to this indicator, our once industrial regions are now equal to **the poorest republics of the CIS and the countries of Africa.** Air travel, vacation, education of children, quality medical care are hard-to-reach or even inaccessible benefits for the majority of the middle class²⁹.

- ✓ “one-third of Russian regions lives very close to the poverty line”³⁰;
- ✓ “given the current economic policy (tight fiscal policy and tight monetary policy) and the

²⁹ Unpromising people (editorial). *Ekspert*, 2019, no. 29, July 15–21, p. 11.

³⁰ Obukhova E., Mavrina L. Survival, but not life. *Ekspert*, 2019, no. 29, July 15–21, p. 18.

weak effect of national projects, technical recession in the economy can be recorded already in 2019, rather than in 2021”³¹.

A rather pessimistic picture emerging in the expert opinion on the present and future of the Russian economy and on the demographic situation is directly related to the moral irresponsibility of the ruling elites, who allow the non-fulfillment of direct orders of the head of state and ignore public opinion trends. However, in his public speeches the President (who, in fact, agrees that not all the indicators set out in the national passports of the projects are being implemented to the fullest extent) regularly says that without setting ambitious goals we would not have had those results that we are now proud of (*Insert 3*).

³¹ Titov experts predicted a recession in 2019. *RBK website*, 2019, August 5. Available at: https://www.rbk.ru/economics/05/08/2019/5d443a6d9a79470cb3c28cbc?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop

Insert 3

Russian President Vladimir Putin on the implementation of national projects

Excerpt	Source
<p>"This is the second time we are meeting in this format to discuss issues related to the implementation of the national projects. Some results have already been achieved over the four months since our last meeting. It is important to see that the regions are playing an increasingly active part in this work, enriching the projects with their own programmes. The federal legal base that we need has been practically completed. The national projects have been discussed by the country's legislators and by the State Council ... Today we are to carry out a detailed analysis of the first results achieved so far. We need to evaluate what we have managed to do, and also in which areas we regrettably still face problems. I will say from the outset that the problems we face are mostly systemic management issues, along with the general barriers to effective market regulation that you are all aware of. The measures implemented as part of the projects should be an incentive and catalyst for systemic transformation in the sectors concerned, but we have yet to see real structural change take place".</p>	<p>V. Putin's Opening Remarks at Meeting of the Council for Implementation of Priority National Projects, April 7, 2006</p>
<p>"We had doubts about how the national projects would go. And the first steps were, indeed, difficult.... Some were afraid that we would be simply doling out money, and that it would go to an unprepared infrastructure and untrained staff, that the government would just waste its money and get no results. I am very glad that this didn't happen and that the opposite is true. Of course, we know and have pointed out that there are problems in the country that are much bigger than those that are addressed by national projects. Moreover, national projects will not help us resolve every problem. As we have said, these are only a catalyst. They are simply a nudge in the right direction, but one that has a number of effects.... I have already talked about my impressions of the people I've met, people who are working on national projects in all areas, and by and large, of course, I was seeing the positive examples. On the whole, these industries have many many problems. We must avoid looking at things through rose-coloured glasses. We need to face the truth. There are still so many problems! And we all need to work hard on all these fronts".</p>	<p>V. Putin's Opening Remarks at the Session of the Council for the Implementation of Priority National Projects and Demographic Policy, September 13, 2007</p>
<p>"I am sure that we can and must make effective use of the development targets the state has set and make use of the possibilities we have today to fulfil all of our commitments and promises. Together, we can take new strides forward in making Russia more prosperous and raising the living standards of our people. I am not going to mention now what we have not yet managed to achieve. We are all well aware of the tasks still before us. Macroeconomic issues continue to be of great importance today".</p>	<p>State Council Meeting on Implementation of the President's 2007 Address to the Russian Federation Federal Assembly, December 19, 2007</p>
<p>"Poor government efficiency and corruption are major problems that everyone can see. We will never be able to tackle the challenges facing our society and our nation without quality, modern public administration, and without a high level of personal responsibility of everyone involved in it".</p>	<p>Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, December 12, 2012</p>
<p>"We have done a lot to implement the 2012 May executive orders. I must say that there were several failures, but overall, despite the demanding targets of these orders, without them we would not have had the results we can see today".</p>	<p>Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, March 1, 2018</p>
<p>"Unfortunately, and I have to say this openly today, we often, not always, but often, see an inert and bureaucratic approach, a desire to shift responsibility to someone else and to postpone meaningful work "for later". Deadlines for drafting regulations and national project goals are being put off for no reason, literally "at one's own discretion". One delay triggers a series of others and the work stalls.</p>	<p>Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, May 8, 2019</p>

Insert 4

Russian President Vladimir Putin on public opinion as a criterion of effectiveness of national projects

Excerpt	Source
<p>“Of course, the people of this country are watching this work very closely and with great interest and are waiting for concrete results – better quality healthcare and education services, more intensive construction of affordable housing and greater rural development”.</p>	<p>V. Putin’s Opening Remarks at Meeting of the Council for Implementation of Priority National Projects, April 7, 2006</p>
<p>“And the most important result is not even the amount of equipment that we have bought for the health system, for primary health care. It’s not the number of ambulances, although we have fully refitted our ambulance fleet. And it’s not grants, like the ones in the education system, or the new equipment ... Actually, it seems to me that the most important result is that people believe that the state cares about them”.</p>	<p>V. Putin’s Opening Remarks at the Session of the Council for the Implementation of Priority National Projects and Demographic Policy, September 13, 2007</p>
<p>“... important systemic objectives have been set for the coming years, and our economy’s continued growth and increasing competitiveness depend on our ability to reach these objectives, as does the development of a strong social policy centred on the population’s interests. This is all important for ensuring Russia’s lasting status as a world leader... Responsibility towards our citizens is not the same thing as what happened some years back when we all made promises, tried to act when the budget was not in balance, ended up driving entire economic sectors into a dead end and then did not know how to extricate ourselves from this situation. Responsibility towards our citizens requires us to carry on an honest dialogue with the public”.</p>	<p>State Council Meeting on Implementation of the President’s 2007 Address to the Russian Federation Federal Assembly, December 19, 2007</p>
<p>“The following principles should be the key to the new model of public administration. First. All parts of the state mechanism and all levels of government must be oriented towards a result that is measurable, transparent and understandable to the public”.</p>	<p>Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, December 12, 2012</p>
<p>“Everything hinges on efforts to preserve the people of Russia and to guarantee the prosperity of our citizens. We must achieve a decisive breakthrough in this area... What should be our priority? Let me reiterate that I believe that the main, key development factor is the well-being of the people and the prosperity of Russian families”.</p>	<p>Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, March 1, 2018</p>
<p>“Very soon, this year people should feel real changes for the better. It is on the basis of their opinion and assessments at the beginning of next year that we will evaluate the first results of our work on the national projects. And we will draw the appropriate conclusions about the work quality and performance at all levels of executive power”.</p>	<p>Presidential Address to Federal Assembly, February 20, 2019</p>
<p>Source: official website of the President of the Russian Federation. Available at: http://www.kremlin.ru</p>	

The initial message of the head of state, therefore, comes from the fact that it is important not so much to achieve the goals of national projects, but to ensure a **stable and, most importantly, really tangible dynamics of growth in the standard of living and quality of life for the general population**. V. Putin noted at one of the meetings on the implementation of national projects: “People are not interested in abstract promises... **The result is what matters for people, here and now, not in some distant future. In any case, people should see that the process is underway, that it is positive and leads to these results**”³². Moreover, to assess the effect of the implementation of national projects, in the end, must be perceived by those for whom they are created – Russians themselves. In V. Putin’s Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2019, this idea sounded particularly clear, but it was also not the first time that he voiced it (*Insert 4*).

This approach, which is based on the priority realization of national interests not only in foreign but also in domestic policy, cannot but be supported. However, real practice shows that the ruling elites do not share it.

“Around Putin in twenty years, a circle of devotees he personally trusted has been formed, but there are no signs of a circle of like-minded people who share a single ideology, whose thinking abilities are not reduced to the tasks of annual budget and short-term objectives, but who have a vision of what the future of Russia in ten or fifty years should be. There are no futurologists, no real ideologists, and no social designers among V. Putin’s closest associates. Trying to look beyond the horizon of two or three years is considered bad manners. Therefore, so far, a global mobilization Development project has

³² Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, May 8, 2019. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60485>

not been launched, and not a single one of the declared national projects has been properly executed”³³.

The level of trust in Vladimir Putin according to VTsIOM is 70–73% in 2019. For comparison, the level of trust in Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is 34–37%, Gennady Zyuganov – 30–34%; Sergey Mironov – 27–29%³⁴.

As a result, national interests remain only at the level of goal setting and public speeches of V. Putin himself. And therefore, it is for a reason that Russian society “trusts only the President”³⁵ in the entire political system of our country. **But the objectively difficult economic and demographic situation in the country, the need to address key problems of people’s concern (associated primarily with a high level of social inequality, poverty, inefficiency of “social elevators”, etc.), a stable level of social tension in society – all this remains acutely relevant and represents a real threat to national security.**

Thus, we cannot but agree with experts who draw attention to the fact that in order to establish new and effective mechanisms in the system of public administration, the rotation of elites is necessary; and therefore, the main task for the President today (because only he really has the opportunity to implement it) is to make this process as manageable as possible and focused on the implementation of national interests. It is important not to allow the rotation of elites to be spontaneous (as it is now), because in this case it becomes a struggle for the political future of various groups and players. According to experts, “being in the grip of pre-transit

³³ Shurygin V. Liberal ghouls and the crisis of the power. *Gazeta “Zavtra”*, 2019, no. 32. Available at: http://zavtra.ru/blogs/liberal-upiri_i_krizis_vlasti

³⁴ VTsIOM database. Available at: https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/doverie_politikam_1/

³⁵ Surkov V. Putin’s long state. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2019, February 11. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html

turbulence and the need to show economic growth, the Russian elite is doomed to generate new ideas and reforms. This does not mean that a significant part of them can be implemented, because **some authors do not have enough motivation, others – resources. But everyone has to be dynamic and visible to stay in the game and qualify for career lifts**³⁶.

Thus, society does not really participate in the rotation of elites and therefore has no opportunity to ensure that national interests occupy a priority place in the motives and priorities of their activities. In these conditions society that has changed in the post-Soviet period can “react” in two ways: it can either “withdraw” and estrange itself from the issues of national development and focus on achieving individual success (what we are seeing now in the form of the increased layer of “self-sufficient” Russians who take responsibility for themselves, but at the same time, easily cross the line of moral standards and are unable “to succeed without abandoning moral landmarks”³⁷); or it can radically change itself and increase the degree of its demands to the authorities. Both options pose serious threats to the Russian statehood, and it is unknown which one is better. Because in the first case we are talking about the loss of the national character of key development issues (in particular, such as the education of the individual, citizen, patriotism and national identity), and in the second case there is a high probability of sharp actualization of social upheavals, including irreversible ones, comparable to the events of 1991.

Indeed, the President has almost no “time for a sluggish start” in solving the problem of effective transition of the political system to a new political cycle. Not only because the period of 2018–2024 is his last (according to the

³⁶ Skorobogatyi P. Healthy evolution of the policy. *Ekspert*, 2019, no. 30, p. 46.

³⁷ Gorshkov M.K., Sedova N.N. Self-sufficient Russians and their life priorities. *Sotsis*, 2015, no. 12, pp. 4–16.

current Constitution of the Russian Federation) presidential term. But also because the moral degradation of society emasculates the potential administration corps of the future, makes it simply unfit to govern the country.

For 50 years in general, the whole society has deteriorated markedly, and there is simply nowhere to choose smart leaders... The degradation of society began in the late Soviet period and continues now. No efforts of the Communist Party and its successor elite could stop the process of global stupefaction of the population living in an atmosphere of global mass culture and consumer values. No reform of the education system can replace the environment in which modern man is formed both in the West and in Russia. And the fact that new education systems are worse than previous ones is also a consequence of the fact that they are created by already degraded products of society.

It is also wrong to reduce the degradation of education only to a conspiracy of the world elite – **this elite itself has become significantly stupid over the past half century. It is no longer able to save itself from disaster, and it floats at the will of the waves, like a cork or some other substance. The problem of rotation of elites is not that the old ones do not let the new ones in, but that the new ones do not physically exist. And what exists is even worse than what is in power now...**³⁸

In early 2018, Vladimir Putin announced his intentions for the next six years: “We need to take long overdue, difficult, but extremely necessary decisions”³⁹. However, so far, the problems of the effectiveness of public administration and the dynamic growth of the standard of living and quality of life remain

³⁸ Khaldey A. The Era of Putin. *Gazeta “Zavtra”*, 2019, August 3. Available at: http://zavtra.ru/blogs/epoha_putina

³⁹ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, March 1, 2018. *Official website of the President of the Russian Federation*. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

relevant. The time factor works against the head of state, every month and year it tightens the knot of public impatience and discontent with the state of affairs in the country, with how the government communicates with the people (especially at the local level), what steps the Government is taking to implement the goals of national development.

The future of national projects (as well as the preservation of the Russian statehood in general, finding a solution to key internal and external tasks) will depend on how the President will be able to overcome the formal and “stencil” approach with which his instructions are executed by representatives of the bureaucracy

at the federal and regional levels. Without a vigorous rotation of the elites, based on the principles of high professional competence and service to the national interests, the problems of effective public administration are unlikely to be solved. From this point of view, there is a high probability of continuation of the sluggish political and economic situation in the country, that is, the conditions that contradict the strategic goals of national development announced by V. Putin in his Address to the Federal Assembly in 2018, and the conditions that are not able to ensure the successful shift of society and power to the new political cycle of 2024.

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