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WAITING FOR THE "PERFECT STORM": POLITICAL ELITES
FACING THE 2020 CHALLENGE

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Abstract

Modern political elites were swept by a "new wave" of the global political and economic crisis, which caused serious problems of the identity of many political structures. The analysis of the political history of the last decade shows that the conditions for a "perfect storm" are taking shape in the world. The crisis is beginning to destroy many social and world institutions, which are losing their previous meaning. This is especially true of political elites and their leaders, who have entered a period of serious systemic crisis. The general state of the world's political elites can be characterized as crisis: the crisis of worldview, the crisis of understanding the prospects, goals, means and resources of constructive development. This crisis is superimposed on more general crises of globalization and world economic leadership. The world is in a fever. Governments are in shock. The elites are in a quandary as they have no clear plan of action. The historical time has thrown a challenge to the elites, to which they have no adequate answer yet. Various elite communities of the world's leading powers are in search for it.

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1. Introduction

Many analysts and experts conceive the events in the world in the first half of 2020 (the COVID-19 pandemic) as the harbinger of a huge economic crisis that have already began in 2008 and was practically completely extinguished (at least, it almost disappeared from the world content) by 2019. The quarantine has tangled all previously tested strategies and tactics of big politics, causing shock and then outright panic in the communities of the ruling political elites. Many analysts and current politicians have developed an openly apocalyptic view of what is happening. But there are those who argue that the threat of a pandemic is far-fetched, and the fear of COVID-19 is exaggerated; that the actions of the authorities to introduce quarantine are a deliberate blow to the economy and social relations of citizens. On the face of a serious discrepancy in assessments of reality, which indicates that the crisis has reached even the scientific community. For the elites, the moment of truth comes when they must show and prove to everyone that they are real and not formal elites. Proceeding from all this, we define the task of this work – to assess current events that are not yet completed and therefore are rationally extremely unpredictable. The object of our research will be a new wave of the global financial and economic crisis provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subject will be the reaction to these events of the world's political and scientific elites.

2. Problem Statement

As the world political history shows, the nature of emergency situations is such that they always inevitably accelerate historical processes. Decisions, which in normal times can take years of discussion, are made in a matter of hours. Immature and even dangerous technologies are put into operation because they become the matter of last resort. Whole countries are becoming experimental subjects in large social experiments (Harari, 2020). The crisis is the most appropriate time for various risky experiments. And many authorities agreed to this, being forced by the unfavorable development of the situation. Rene Rohrbeck, the head of the department of forecasting, innovation and transformation of a French business school (EDHEC Business School), noted that the pandemic has shown that people who occupy leading positions in society should be able to navigate in unpredictable situations. In the future, he said, there will be a shift from tried and tested leadership methods to other action-oriented approaches. The ability to take action, to reduce uncertainty through action, will be in great demand (Lenta, 2020a). Only coordinated efforts can help in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. "I really believe," R. Rohrbeck said, "that the fight against this crisis will further unite us as a world community... that it will strengthen our ability to find joint answers to other global challenges that we face as humanity" (as cited in Lenta, 2020a, par. 3-4). Many are already beginning to develop an apocalyptic consciousness. To many, in their fears, the four horsemen of the apocalypse have already appeared – death, hunger, war and epidemic. The epidemic has already come real. After it, comes the war and everything else... The elites are confused and do not understand what to do. Therefore, some took a break. The crisis of liberalism put a stop to the globalization project carried out by its supporters. In such conditions, many experts and current politicians started talking about the end of the domination of the Anglo-Saxon world order (Stiglitz, 2012).

3. Research Questions

A new end of history is coming, caused by the systemic crisis of the modern system of international relations. The globalization project has indeed found itself in a very serious crisis deadlock. And this crisis is mainly caused by the growing problems of the main sponsor of this project – the United States. The coronavirus caused 40 million unemployed people in the US, which exacerbated the social situation in the country. The split of the American elites has led to the destruction of the common American consensus. One ill-considered decision in such a situation can give rise to a socio-political tsunami. And it happened when, at the end of May 2020, racial and social unrest began in the United States, engulfing most of the States. The so-called *perfect storm* came to the state: a number of unfavorable factors (social, economic, epidemiological, political, racial) simultaneously combined, therefore appreciably increasing their total destructive effect. All this significantly reduces the competitiveness of the collective West, makes it vulnerable to modern global challenges and threats.

4. Purpose of the Study

One of the basic tenets of American society was their so-called *American Dream* – the belief that each next generation lives better than the previous one. At the beginning of the XXI century, this formula failed showing its inconsistency. In the world in general and in the United States in particular, the social gap between rich and poor has become alarming, and the middle class (the backbone of any developing society) has begun to rapidly shrink. The destruction of the American Dream concept is a serious blow to the US national identity. Indeed, according to American analysts, The American Dream is the ideal of freedom or opportunity, which was formulated by the "founding fathers", the spiritual power of the nation. If the American system is the skeleton of American politics, then the American dream is its soul (Safire, 1993). The economic crisis has exacerbated social stratification in the world, and in particular in the leading countries. It is known from the laws of physics that the GDP of any country is proportional to the energy expended, the work done or the movement made. Therefore, wealth is the result of movement, and since the latter is always hierarchical (i.e. heterogeneous), this practically excludes the existence of equality. In the United States itself, over the first two decades of the 21st century, there was a steady growth in the stratification of the population. In particular, the gap between the black and white population of the United States was widening. For example, if in 2000 the average income of an African American household was 36 % lower than that of whites, then in 2011 this figure rose to 42 %. As a result, by the end of the 2010s more than 50M Americans fell below the poverty line. This state of affairs led to an increase in the number of crimes and the intensification of the protest movement. In an economic crisis, the crisis of social relations becomes a time bomb, ready to go off at any moment.

5. Research Methods

Supercapitalism in the United States has provoked the development of a speculative economy based on the formal principle of development. It was this parasitic practice of Wall Street that created favorable conditions for the stagnation of the world economy (Gerard & Dominique, 2013; Lo, 2012).

Analysts have previously admitted that the global financial and economic crisis of 2008 was not overcome, but driven underground. It was just waiting for its time suppressed to a safe level by situational means. And finally, the perfect opportunity to re-express itself in all its strength has come. Many leading American economists wrote that something was wrong with the American economy (Stiglitz et al., 2016). But the acting politicians refused to listen to them, to believe them and did not react to those alarming signals. Instead of looking for the origins of the aggravated problems within themselves, the elites of the collective West amicably began to blame everything on their "invented" enemies. It was during the pandemic crisis that many current EU and US politicians started talking about China's economic expansion, and that they could no longer develop normally, since Beijing was actually establishing its invisible control over them (in the pre-crisis years, they blamed Russia for everything, masking their problems in their own societies under Russophobia). According to Deutsche Welle journalist Frank Siren, who has lived in Beijing for over 20 years, the corona pandemic has severed supply chains around the world. More than 80 % of manufacturing companies are struggling with shortages. The logistics have also changed, which has led to an increase in the cost of the final product (Sierens, 2020). China is becoming a major problem for the West as it gradually took over from it the title of world factory. And COVID-19 has become China's swan song as the world's premier workplace. And China will further strengthen this role. The European Union is also experiencing an open systemic crisis, which, according to Marine Le Pen, has turned into a "prison of nations", under the yoke of ultra-liberalism dogmas. In the face of the pandemic, many states returned to protectionism deliberately abandoning the globalism project. The free trade agreement is bursting at the seams. The economic and commercial activities of the EU structures turned out to be catastrophic for the countries included in this "Union". The Union was conceived as a voluntary agreement, and not a structure based on submission to dogmas, which, moreover, are ineffective and understandable only for the European bureaucracy (Garach, 2020).

6. Findings

In the 1990s, F. Fukuyama prophesied about the end of the history of communist times. In the 2020s, the time has come for the end of the history of the Western liberal world order. According to the American scientist Greger (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic is just a full-dress rehearsal. The real show, the "plague" from which half of us can die, is still ahead. The apocalypse is inevitable. When this killer comes, the probability of human survival will be 50–50. Civilization as we know it will cease to exist (Greger, 2020). The planet is threatened by viral threats that are much more dangerous than COVID-19. The popular British scientist Greger (2020) calls the COVID-19 pandemic "an easy poorly prepared rehearsal". After all, this is nothing when compared to the potential danger that comes from pets. So, in order to avoid an avian flu pandemic, Greger (2020) advises to destroy all chickens in the world or change the conditions of their rearing. In his opinion, if humanity does not begin to behave differently, then in the near future half of the world's population may die. As noted by the famous Israeli futurist Harari (2020), in this time of crisis, we face two particularly important options. The first is between totalitarian oversight and citizen empowerment. The second is between nationalist isolation and global solidarity. Liberalists fear that human rights violations will provoke a crisis of democracy and a flourishing of authoritarianism in countries where it did not exist before. The American political scientist

professor at Hamline University David Schultz argues that digital control is growing in the world and the future may turn into an “electronic GULAG”. The American authorities primarily blamed the authoritarian authorities of China and Russia for this, arguing that even in a pandemic, the civilized (Western) world cannot give up basic liberal principles and violate democratic values. Meanwhile, the official statistics of May 2020 indicated that it was the liberal USA and Great Britain that came out on top in the world in terms of the number of deaths from coronavirus: 104.4 and 38.1 thousand people, respectively (Harris, 2020). The authoritarian systems of China and Russia have more effectively dealt with the challenge of COVID-19. In order to avoid the catastrophic development of the scenario, humanity needs to change its relationship with nature and the animal world. It's time to reflect on the words of the late Nobel laureate biologist Joseph Lederberg who said: “We live in evolutionary competition with bacteria and viruses. There is no guarantee that we will survive” (Greger, 2020, p.42).

7. Conclusion

The crisis of traditional democracies arose in the context of the degradation of political elites, the formalization of liberal values, and even racism emerging from the underground. The ultra-liberal elite of the West does not know what to do in the context of the crisis of globalism. The psychological stress it is experiencing in 2020 threatens to destroy their entire political system, which was built under the global dominance of the United States. In this sense, the end of the history of their well-being and prosperity is coming for them. And they will experience this end very painfully.

The authorities have to operate in a regime of ever-changing unpredictability. Often, some scientific or statistical data contradict others. As a result, the elites commit ill-considered actions that subsequently turn into even more complex problems. So, on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, France burned 1.6 billion masks. As it turns out, a stockpile of one billion medical masks and more than 700 million FFP2 masks have been stockpiled to fight swine flu and SARS. However, after the publication of studies that these diseases are not as dangerous as previously thought, the authorities decided to destroy the stocks (Lenta, 2020b).

The crisis of elitism among the elites is manifested in the strengthening of the categories of carnival political culture, which is an excellent disguise for their professional inferiority. It is professional inconsistency that testifies to the absence of elitism in the elites, which are only capable of playing the role of the elite, but not professionally fulfilling its functions. Many threats are transferred from the real to the virtual realm. Elites prefer to construct problems that they have invented, which they can overcome very effectively, than to solve problems that society really faces. As a result, problems in objective reality have accumulated and acquired an avalanche-prone form, which the ruling elites can no longer physically cope with. Therefore, they are sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of a carnival political culture, with which they replace objective reality. Such elites are guided in their practices not by scientific knowledge, but by fakes, which feed them, giving them strength and confidence.

The elite, split into separate factions, ceased to perceive themselves analytically. For an adequate state, they now need a new methodological principle that would objectively do this. In the previous political era, the elites felt themselves self-sufficient, that they are the best in the world, and they have no

equal, they have no competitors. But most importantly, they have lost the ability to think critically and make non-standard decisions; they never found an effective recipe for dealing with racial and ethnic conflicts. The COVID-19 crisis put an end to the comfortable existence of such political elites. There is plenty of evidence for this. Let us turn attention only to the main sign of this systemic crisis – the strengthening of the carnival political culture in the elites, which indicates their separation from objective reality, the withdrawal into the world of their own illusions and fantasies.

Racial war. According to many analysts, the so-called melting pot in the United States has stopped and has begun to rapidly degrade (especially in recent years). The model of ethnic interaction advertised by the American media has become a national symbol for the United States throughout the twentieth century (Mann, 1973, p. 172). In accordance with this paradigm, the formation of American national identity had to proceed according to the formula of "fusion", "mixing" of all peoples, assuming both cultural and biological mixing. This theoretical concept was apologetic in nature, since it denied the existence of any racial or cultural conflicts in society (Rohrer, 2008).

As recent political history shows, the “melting pot” propaganda was an ideological strategist, but in reality everything turned out to be much more serious and not like it was conceived. In the United States, conflicts on racial and social grounds regularly break out. From a “melting pot” this country turns into a “salad bowl” (Lapitsky, 2004) where each “element” tries to obtain certain privileges at the expense of the other. The social and racial unrest that broke out in the United States in May 2020 became an element of the pre-election struggle for the White House between Democrats and Republicans. A large-scale uprising of the ochlocratic masses began: the end of the melting pot history was marked by massive looting, vandalism, robbery, violence, murder, which became the unattractive reality of those unrest. The US political elites also do not know what to do with all this. But they are actively using this unrest in the struggle against rival groups for power.

This kind of socio-political "outbursts of indignation" has occurred in the United States before. However, only in 2020 the scale of what is happening has reached the level of almost the entire country. In some cases, the police and current politicians (mainly the Democratic Party) openly supported and sided with the demonstrators, blaming the current authorities and, in particular, US President D. Trump for everything. In the wake of the protest movement in the United States, the perfect storm emerged. The uprising of the ochlocracy was accompanied by a struggle between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party for power, aggravation of racial conflicts, vandalism and looting. Following the USA, protests of this kind rolled across the West European "showcase of democracy" (London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, etc.). It turned out that these "developed" Western countries have similar socio-economic and racial problems.

The arrival of flourishing diversity is the departure of faded monopolarity. The crisis of ultra-liberalism was reflected in the policy of globalization and democratization of the world political space pursued by the supporters of this ideological dogma. Many in these conditions started talking about the end of the dominance of liberalism and the domination of globalism. The dogma turned out to be refuted by the most objective reality, and the model of carnival political culture proposed by the Western elites simply did not stand the test of time.

The West is concerned that China will become a world leader in a new smart manufacturing based on 5G technology and artificial intelligence (Sierens, 2020). Western politicians also fear that China will outstrip them in developing artificial intelligence projects, space programs (lunar exploration) and developing new logistics projects (Chiodo & di Fahrlander, 2020). And this is the end of the history of the world process, which was headed by the collective West, in particular the Anglo-Saxons, and in particular the United States. Attempts to organize resistance to the Chinese onslaught on the West were unsuccessful. The United States has never been able to lead this resistance. Although there were attempts to stick to this coalition (in addition to the EU and the Anglo-Saxon five) there were also countries located along the perimeter of the borders with China (Russia, South Korea, Australia and India). It is obvious that the United States is fighting to maintain its monopoly of world domination. But it is also obvious that every year it becomes more and more difficult for them to do all this.

American futurist, executive director of the Da Vinci Institute Thomas Frey, asks the question: how has the coronavirus changed the course of human history? He believes that the coronavirus pandemic could be a kind of "reset" for humanity. He warns that COVID-19 could lead to seclusion becoming the new social norm. "There is something very healing about being able to press the pause button on all the stresses of everyday life and hide in your own cocoon" (Frey, 2020, par. 3). However, he notes the "unifying force" of the pandemic.

The crisis is becoming a common trait that we all share, and we feel comfortable sharing our experiences with online acquaintances on the other side of the world... Fighting a common enemy is a great unifying force. It is much more difficult to perceive as an enemy a person from another country, as well as a person of a different race, religion and culture, when both of you went through the hard times of the global crisis. (Frey, 2020, par. 9)

Looking into the post-coronavirus future, discussing the changes that will take place in the military-industrial complex of the leading states, Frey (2020) noted that the era of heavy weapons is coming to an end, and bio- and cyber-wars, as well as wars of minds, are just beginning. In his opinion, the times when threats will become invisible will be marked by the development of artificial intelligence. This is, in particular, about the development of biological weapons.

What we are witnessing today in the space of world international relations can be characterized as the arrival of flourishing diversity, against the background of a fading mono-polarity that has begun to recede into history. All of this deepens the identity crisis. The chaos generated by COVID-19 is causing a shock among elites, exacerbating the conflict of interest associated with the redefinition of global leadership. The threats that have arisen have matured in the bowels of the Western system for decades. 2020 was the time of the breakthrough of all these pain points and the beginning of the destruction of the carnival picture of the political world.

The world community froze in anticipation of the "perfect storm". The political elites were completely unprepared for the challenge of 2020. They did not expect to find themselves in such extreme conditions. To survive, they need to create a security mechanism that would be able to prevent and neutralize the onset of such phenomena at an early stage of their development. It is obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic has become the very challenge of 2020 to which modern political and scientific

elites are trying to find an adequate response. They are not good at it yet. The solution to the problem drowns in endless disputes and discussions, or in the criminal silence of responsible persons who simply do not know how to work outside the protocol of their competence. We have the right to assume that in the future the elites will have more and more such non-protocol situations and they need to learn how to work at the maximum power of their creative abilities. So far, we see a slow departure of the elites from the historical proscenium. The departure which they did not fully realize themselves. But it will become inevitable, if they do not find an adequate answer to the threateningly growing challenge of our time for them.

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