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THE ENTITY AND ATTRIBUTES OF ERSATZ-ELITES

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Abstract

The elite includes various social groups, depending on the methodological principles and preferences of researchers. One of the main characteristic of an elite is the possession of power resources, authority and mobilization potential. A political elite is a group in a society, relatively homogeneous, making decisions, occupying administrative and managerial positions. Major inherent features of any elite include the presence of scrupulous integrity and aspiration to the growth of public good. Modern political discourse believes that no elites per se are currently present which leads to the proverbial question: is it elite or ersatz-elite? Possessing power for the sake of power, accumulating and augmenting one's own financial and economic resources, opportunism, lack of social responsibility define ersatz-elites rather than elite groups. The elite is replaced by a macrosocial group that only looks like an elite, without innovative guidelines and principles. This work is not aimed at distinguishing integral and universal features of both notions, it is only focused on the description of functioning and the strategy of ersatz-elite activities in the social and cultural environment of North Caucasus. The researchers are also interested in ethnocracy, the tribal structure of elite incorporation, persistency, weak vertical and horizontal mobility. North Caucasus is the area prone to conflicts, ethnic and political tensions, territorial and ethnic disputes and disturbance. The ability of authoritative elites to covertly mimic, circulate and function is critical for its vitality and correlation with the federal political and administrative elites.

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Keywords: Ersatz-elite, Russia, North Caucasus, tribalism, region, tensions.



1. Introduction

As noted by political scientists, the genesis of elites in Russia is not complete, it still continues. The analysis of principles and mechanisms of generating elites represents an important researcher's task. In our opinion, environment, functional requirements, circulation and formation of elites define its quality, tactics of activity. North Caucasus still has strong traditional institutions, which are built on tribal relationships and connections. Any methods of reforming, westernization face opposition and debates (Akaev, 2014; Khadisov, 2015). Archaization brings high risks, as the incorporation of elites occurs not through open channels, but is done as a result of personal loyalty, kinship, nepotism and etc.

Elites and ersatz-elites have a lot of similarities, yet there are also significant differences. As noted by Ostrovskaya T.A. and Khachmafova Z.R., to «possess» has utmost primacy for ersatz-elites, thus excluding from the list such concepts as intellectuality, morality and conservation of traditions, responsibility, competence, social value. Unlike elites, ersatz-elites add to the list such concepts as: primacy of personal gain, vulgarity and affectation, cynicism and corruption, intragroup solidarity, imitation and etc. (Ostrovskaya & Khachmafova, 2014). It is possible to say that the lack of authentic elites leads to its replacement with a temporary elite, which pursues its own personal gain.

The specific authoritarian nature of political processes (so called «manual control»), social differentiation, marginalization result in the decreasing activity of democratic institutes, hinder the formation of a civil society, and, consequently, in autarchy and absenteeism (Karabushenko, 2015). Rising authority of traditional institutes, national clan nepotism, kinship and the like prevent the elites from benefitting the entrepreneur system recruiting, thus leading to permanent generation of social and political tensions.

Table 01. Index of democratization of North Caucasus republics as a result of presidential elections in 1999-2002. (Rosstat, 2004).

Republic	Participation (%) voted to the total list of voters)	Competitiveness (%) votes for candidates, who lost elections)	Level of democracy
Karachay-Cherkessia	70,17	24,29	5
North Ossetia	60,13	43,98	4
Adygeya	62,83	31,11	3
Kabardino-Balkaria	85,87	12,82	2

Table 02. Staff of the legislative bodies in North Caucasus republics in the third electoral cycle

Social and professional groups	State Council-Khase of Adygeya, session 2006, 54 deputies		National Assembly of Daghestan, Session 2007, 72 deputies		National Assembly of Ingushetia, session 2008, 27 deputies		Parliament of Chechnya, 2008, 41 deputies	
	Number of deputies	%	Number of deputies	%	Number of deputies	%	Number of deputies	%

Directors of manufacturing and commercial enterprises	17	1	16	43	6	2	7	17
Bank executives	-	-	1	11	1	4	-	-
Government, president administration of republics	1	2	-	-	5	8	9	22
Deputies of previous sessions	20	7	37	55,1	11	1	28	68
Chiefs, employees of local administration	2	4	-	-	4	5	3	7
Police authorities	-	-	-	-	2	7	4	10
Military servicemen	1	2	-	-	-	-	2	5
Industry	15	7	-	-	-	-	4	10
Agriculture	13	24	1	11	-	-	5	12
Education	6	1	8	11	3	1	7	17
Healthcare	2	4	3	44	1	4	2	5
Mass media	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2

2. Problem Statement

At the current stage of development Russia faces the absence of elites per se. Low competence, populism, luxury, possession of wealth, corruption, narrow-mindedness and etc. have become the most typical characteristics of the ruling segment of the society. Consumerism of ersatz-elites brings high risks as alternation of power, mobility, transparent elections, reforms destroy such elites.

3. Research Questions

Ersatz-elites due to the impact of inherent ethnic and political processes in North Caucasus are tightly integrated into the federal political and administrative elites. The ability of ersatz-elites to mobilise population, retransmit its interests forces the federal government to communicate and bargain with them. Ersatz-elites own properties in Moscow and abroad, hold accounts in western and eastern banks, spend holidays in European countries, such comprador-like functioning is typical for the whole range of elites (Salgiriev, Betilmerzaeva, Akhtaev, & Gaziev, 2017; Salgiriev, Betilmerzaeva, Shamsuev, & Osmaev, 2018).

According to the annual report of the research institute Credit Suisse on the world prosperity, within 2017 the number of millionaires in Russia increased by 40 thousand people. «From July 2017 to July 2018 the number of dollar millionaires in Russia rose by 30 per cent, and was equal to 172 thousand people. 10 per cent of the richest people in the country possess 82 per cent of all personal wealth (this indicator is higher than in the USA and China). The total wealth of Russians is estimated at 2,2 trillions of US dollars. Translated in terms of per person of adult population, this indicator is equal to almost 20 thousand dollars,

however, it is still lower than the level of 2007 in Russia and is three times lower than the average prosperity per person in the world, which, according to Credit Suisse, equals to 63,1 thousand dollars». The increasing sanctions policy from American and several European countries, devaluating rouble, decreasing incomes of population, stagnation enable us to see the opposite effect – the growing number of the superrich.

4. Purpose of the Study

To analyse the specific features of circulation and moral values of ersatz-elites, in particular, in North Caucasus. To establish its correlation with powerful elites of the centre.

5. Research Methods

This work uses general philosophical methods such as abstraction, analysis, analogy, generalization, forecasting. Within the structural and functional approach researchers have employed free data, statistics, scientific literature.

6. Findings

Ersatz-elites have only external similarities with elites, their distinctive feature is the principle of «accumulation», possession of resources. The ersatz-elite is characterized by internal rigidity, authoritarianism, publicity, privileges, luxury. Ersatz-elites have high mobility of resources, ability to retransmit community signals, at proper time become «leaders of opinion». In the multi-ethnic environment of North Caucasus in Russia, with its complex system of elite incorporation and social marginality, ersatz-elites can function and thrive. The federal authority relies on local elites, as they can influence the ethnic and political processes in this highly conflict-prone region

7. Conclusion

Studying the characteristics, types and activity of ersatz-elites is an important research task, they remain relatively unexplored. The genesis of elites is not finished, the ruling elite started its formation at the beginning of the 90s via merging party established figures with those closest to the elite. Ersatz-elites have destructive impact on political processes and reforming, leading to permanent escalation. They can exist exclusively in times of crises and tensions.

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