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Presidential elections in Russian Federation: a competition without competitors

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Abstract or executive summary

In the Russian Federation, electoral ballots are organized as a “celebration of democracy”. On March 18, 2018, the Russian Federation held presidential elections. Eight candidates met with the voters in front of the ballot boxes. Did they succeed or not to make a demonstration of the pluralism of the political opinion in Russia and how honest was the public debate? Have the necessary premises been provided for a fair and balanced fight between opponents? What were the candidates' theses and projects presented properly? How did they define the future and how did they relate to the recent past? Identifying answers to these questions, which can easily be transformed into research assumptions, could offer those interested in policies promoted by Moscow some insights into the content of the future political decisions of the Kremlin. The objective of this study is to make a more analytical overview in the content of electoral platforms, the strategies adopted by the candidates, and the platforms they were willing to assess the legitimacy of the "celebration" of democracy during an election in Russia in 2018.

Keywords: presidential elections, Russian Federation, 2018, candidates, platforms

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Introduction - Background

In November 2008, the Russian Duma approved by a sweeping majority, even in the first reading², a constitutional change proposed by the acting president at that time, Dmitry Medvedev. Thus, according to those changes, starting with the next presidential term, the new (old) head of state would have a six-year term. Another constitutional amendment was related to the extension of the legislative term by one year: from four to five years. Coming from the most modern president of the Russian Federation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Dmitry Medvedev, constitutional changes further diminished the confidence in the near possibility of transforming the political system.

Vladimir Putin was elected for the first time as president of the state in 2000. After two consecutive mandates as president of the country, he was appointed as prime minister. At that time, in 2011, the main question was the following: will Vladimir Putin return to the post of President of the country in 2012 or will he allow Dmitry Medvedev to remain the power interface for another six years? The mystery was only elucidated at the end of September 2011 when Vladimir Putin declared that he was planning to run for the presidency.

The first part of the presidential election campaign (pre-election) was relatively calm. Vladimir Putin did not have a classic electoral program. The confidence (in the way of working of the political system that he encouraged) allowed him to appear in front of the electorate with a series of six articles³ in which he presented his vision of how the main macroeconomic and social indicators developed during his time as a prime minister and how public policies should evolve⁴ for the next six years. The official launch of the "Eurasian Union"⁵ project has captured for a long period of time internal and external policy debates. Until the parliamentary elections in December 2011⁶, Vladimir Putin's electoral strategy worked in the "safe area" system. Protests organized by the opposition⁷ have shown that there are some dysfunctions and too much demand for "rights and liberties" from a social category that has reached a degree of economic and social satisfaction. What followed in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation after the presidential election in 2012 may be somewhat partly explained by the internal transformations that Russia

² The proposal to amend the Constitution was voted by 388 deputies. Only 58 MEPs voted against this proposal.

³ At the time of drafting this policy paper, the content of the electoral program, as well as the six articles, couldn't be accessed on the website www.putin2012.ru. The content of these articles was strongly promoted, allowing Vladimir Putin to have access to the electorate even before the official launch of the electoral campaign that was February 12, 2012.

⁴ Заработал сайт кандидата в президенты Путина. Премьер обнародовал проект предвыборной программы, Newsru.com, January 12, 2012, <https://www.newsru.com/russia/12jan2012/putin2012.html>

⁵ Новый интеграционный проект для Евразии — будущее, которое рождается сегодня, Izvestia, October 03, 2011, <https://iz.ru/news/502761>

⁶ Итоги выборов в Госдуму России шестого созыва, RIA Novosti, 2011, https://ria.ru/trend/results_elections_Russia_parlament_09122011/

⁷ Десятки тысяч россиян выйдут на митинг "За честные выборы", RBK, December 10, 2011, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/12/2011/5703f03a9a79477633d3af46>

was passing through. There was an acute need to distract the Russian citizen from the struggle for democratization of society. Very often foreign policy has been used as a tool in meeting the needs of internal policy and stabilization.

The elections in March 2018 had a different tone, even if their final result was easily predictable by most of those interested in how they were organized by the governmental authorities. The biggest issue of the March 2018 elections was that none of the candidates who accepted to take part in this democratic process relied on the fact that it could bring a change in the system or force it to change from inside. For the main candidate, the victory was obtained by the political system, the way it was built or adapted to the patrimonial interests of a small group of people. The processes are confirmed by Russian experts, involved in the monitoring process of different types of elections in Russia:⁸

“... our elections shared an important characteristic of being strongly controlled by the executive administration that lies on the top of the so-called ‘power vertical’.”

The difference between the 2012 elections and the 2018 elections consists of different figures. The debate is not about the quality of the electoral act:⁹

“Anomalous voting” (identified using the method of Sergey Shpilkin), which we associate with direct falsification, was somewhat lower than in 2012 but made up no less than 8.5 million votes. In all likelihood, another 6-7 million votes were given through administration-corporation enforcement. Without these manipulations, Putin's result would have been about 70 per cent with a turnout of just over 50 per cent.”

Thus, this time, the authorities were focused on figures, on voting, that it did not record a drop. The system wanted only an internal reconfirmation that it has the necessary resources and to support its needs to continue the "ascension" on the international stage.

What is the current policy? Why is difficult to find an alternative?

Problem 1: The current policy

The current policy promoted by the current Moscow leadership, at the declarative level, has as priorities the internal and external transformation of Russia, the restoration of the status at a global level and the contribution to solving the toughest problems faced by the international relations system. These priorities, as well as the definition of the Russian national interests, are

⁸ Andrei Buzin, Reflections on elections in Russia: based on 30 years of my observations, <https://www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/142700>

⁹ Putin's Reelection: Capturing Russia's Electoral Patterns | A Discussion with Kirill Rogov, PonarsEurasia, June 07, 2018, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/point-counter/article/putins-reelection-capturing-russias-electoral-patterns-discussion-kirill-rogov>

not disputed by Russia's partners until it presents its strategies or tools to achieve these goals. The dispute refers to how Moscow promotes its interests, not how it defines them.

Why does the discussion about foreign policy matter in the electoral context? The reasons are multiple:

- it allows distracting the attention of the “electoral audience” from social and economic problems by creating the illusion of external "threats";

- it projects false debates about the role and place of Russia in the international relations system as a negotiator, bearer of the solution, generating new models (democratic and economic);

- it creates the illusion that the "legitimate" authority has enough resources to fight an "external enemy";

- it suggests that only the current form of state government allows citizens to enjoy socio-economic privileges they have not previously known.

In this context, just preserving the country's leadership in the hands of the same leader is the electoral option acceptable to the system.

Changing the electoral system in the interest of a small group of people or, in this case, of an economic elite, who manages financial and commercial flows, and of the political elite around the current president, also as **limiting any options / opportunities for opposition** - the real one, to participate in electoral processes or in public policy life. The **removal of critical voices or the restraint of information space**¹⁰ only to loyal media players - are elements that describe the current state of Russian domestic politics. Under these circumstances, when the legislation in force, the resources and the content of the official public policies have only one purpose, namely to serve the preservation of the current governing system, the society enters a kind of **civic and political standby**, trying to preserve for as long as possible the resources at its disposal. The option to resist the system remains a "privilege" for a few citizens. Many withdrew, trying to adjust to the political offer of the system, without opposing in any way.

This reorganization of the political system in Russia lasted more than a decade, thus more than the first two presidential mandates of Vladimir Putin. However, triggering the protests in December 2011 after the legislative elections had the effect of continuously allocating resources to strengthen already-dominated positions: in regions, in large cities, in different sectors of the economy, and public institutions.

¹⁰ Q&A: Shrinking economic independence threatens Russia's critical media market, interviews with Artem Filatov, International Press Institute, August 02, 2017, <https://ipi.media/qa-shrinking-economic-independence-threatens-russias-critical-media-market/>

The elements mentioned above influence the electoral behaviour of the Russian citizen in the direction wanted by the Kremlin leadership. The electoral behaviour is the result of continuous, systematic actions. This allows experts to highlight certain trends at national or regional level¹¹ and, at the same time, to predict the results of the electoral act. Kiril Rogov explains the way patterns have been working in different Russian regions for the past 15 years:¹²

“On the one hand, there is a group of 15-16 regions (mostly ethnic republics, but also several "Russian" regions like, for example, the Kemerovo district) where the incumbent or dominant party obtains an exceedingly high result in the presence of high voter turnout. That is, United Russia wins approximately 80 per cent of the vote and turnout is roughly 80 per cent of the population. Political scientist Dmitry Oreshkin has described these regions as "electoral sultanates”.”

We are witnessing a pattern in which the authorities continue to allocate resources for "stability," and the voter obeys this "stability." At the same time, the authorities explore the benefits of Russian nationalism and the concept of *"besieged fortress mentality and a sense of resurging grandeur in Russians"*¹³. The explanation for this is quite simple: *"The game of superpower is quite a working mechanism for self-justification for power"*¹⁴.

Problem 2: The opposition or the "so-called opposition"

The most pressing issue of the Russian internal policy in the context of any types of elections is the lack of a viable political competition. *„While the true opposition candidates were kept away from the election, the alternatives offered to voters on the ballot could not be taken seriously,”*¹⁵ this being the opinion of Ekaterina Schulmann Senior Lecturer (associate professor) at the School of Public Policy of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

Experts appreciate the Moscow regime as an autocratic one, capable of holding seemingly free and fair elections, in which the opposition can and must appear as an alternative, as a false one, to the main option - Vladimir Putin. At the same time, the same experts argue that the current political system will not go through extreme transformations towards democracy or

¹¹ Выборы президента — 2018, Карта результатов с детализацией до территориальных комиссий, <https://2018.golosinfo.org/>

¹² Putin's Reelection: Capturing Russia's Electoral Patterns | A Discussion with Kirill Rogov, PonarsEurasia, June 07, 2018, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/point-counter/article/putins-reelection-capturing-russias-electoral-patterns-discussion-kirill-rogov>

¹³ Andrei Kolesnikov, History Is the Future: Russia in Search of the Lost Empire, Book review, Carnegie Moscow, February 15, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75544>

¹⁴ Ivan Davidov, ПОЧЕМУ ОН ПОБЕДИЛ, the New Times, March 19, 2018, <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/153807>

¹⁵ ELECTION POSTMORTEM, Free Russia, March 22, 2018, <http://www.4freerussia.org/election-postmortem/>

dictatorship¹⁶. The current structure of power is the safest to keep control of political and economic resources: ensures sufficient democracy for all.

Moreover, the regime managed to convince the "third age opposition" that the only option for internal or external policy is the one proposed by the Kremlin. These elements of "solidarity" stem from the analysis of their electoral platforms. So, in this context, the role of the opposition has been reduced only to mimicking an inclusive system for whatever means real opposition. The regime needs the opposition to officially exist. This position of complementarity has only one objective: participation in the sharing of political and economic benefits. The "third-age" opposition, represented by Vladimir Jirinovski or Ghennady Ziuganov, and their political parties constantly promotes the same ideas, mostly nostalgic for the grandeur of the Soviet Union, or simply confirms that the acting president Vladimir Putin makes good decisions:¹⁷

„The presence of political leaders and platforms is not enough for political competition to exist. After all, the oppositional Yabloko has been existing for years in Russia, with no major problems, a clear platform and a well-known leader.”

The "young" opposition, on the other hand, which calls itself a progressive "alternative", is divided, lacking in cohesion elements and vision, and is always looking for discursive supporters outside the country. Late protests are not necessarily demonstrations to support opposition leader Alexey Navalny. They are rather a form of political "rebellion". Otherwise, it can not be explained the tendency of its leader, Alexey Navalny, not to avoid deprivation of liberty on numerous occasions and to fight outside prison. Navalny requires cohesion from others but is more "selfish" in being a model of cohesion.

When authoritarianism grows, there is only one solution: the unification of all opposition forces. This has not happened before or after the March 2018 elections. It is a mistake that was observed in previous electoral periods: 2004, 2008 or 2012¹⁸. In 2018, this tactic was only re-used by the system against so-called liberals. The opposition failed to mobilize its resources, although the declarative purpose was the same: to fight the current source of power, and oppose to the circle of interests it blames and which they tried to unravel¹⁹.

After the publication of the results of the presidential election, the opposition has only managed to further accentuate the crisis they face: lack of vision, lack of cohesion and different

¹⁶ Russia-2042, Fight for the Ballot, the Kremlin's Foreign Policy, Institute of Modern Russia, January 1-12, 2018, <https://imrussia.org/en/the-rundown/media-must-reads/2894-russia-2042,-fight-for-the-ballot,-the-kremlin%E2%80%99s-foreign-policy>

¹⁷ Andrei Buzin, Reflections on elections in Russia: based on 30 years of my observations, <https://www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/142700>

¹⁸ Vladimir Gelman, The Troubled Rebirth of Political Opposition in Russia, Ponars Eurasia, September 2014, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/troubled-rebirth-political-opposition-russia>

¹⁹ Он вам не Димон, the Anti-Corruption Fund of Alexey Navalny, March 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrwk7_GF9g

interests. With allegations to Xenia Sobchak, Alexey Navalny most likely changed the strategy for his own interest: he accused a potential partner to get long-term dividends for himself. What did he get? A public blame for this strategy by the main supporters of the Kremlin. Sobchak has not won anything in this dispute with the Navalny but also has not lost anything. She has the great advantage of creating her own window of opportunity for future parliamentary elections. In the last part of her electoral campaign, the creation of a new political force was announced. The authors of the idea, however, cannot offer any guarantee that the future political formation will strengthen the fragile positions of the Russian opposition.

In his view, Navalny is strong enough to promote itself without other forces of the opposition, without the support of Xenia Sobchak and the political force she intends to launch. This approach to the internal resources of the movement he leads may seem arrogant. The opposition is still missing the most important element: a vision for the future of the Russian Federation. On the other hand, Alexey Navalny should consider the fact that a political force without a free leader who can participate in debates is just as useless as the “third age” opposition. The role of the political "victim of repercussions" can be tedious, especially if a deeper analysis of this leader's behaviour is made and other weaknesses can be highlighted.

The Russian opposition at this moment is exactly how Moscow wants to be: weak, without strong leaders, unable to generate a qualitative change, and with a low reaction capacity. Under the current macroeconomic conditions, when the benefits of socio-economic policies diminished, Russia's new political elite could come from regions where economic protests are becoming more common and generating more and more problems to the system image.

Problem 3: External considerations regarding the elections process

- *Illegal elections in annexed Crimea*

Even though there was this policy of "non-acceptance" and non-involvement, outside monitoring offered more elements to analyze the Kremlin's policy content regarding these elections. Crimea has played a huge part in these elections and not only because of the total number of voters, but also to calculate the will of the inhabitants to remain part of Russia as a percentage. Officially, Crimean voted as the election organizers wanted: more than 92% of the inhabitants of the peninsula voted in favour of candidate Vladimir Putin, who needed a reconfirmation of the results of the illegal referendum in March 2014. However, Crimea influenced not only the number of votes in favour of Vladimir Putin but allowed to highlight some changes in the behaviour of the electorate at the country level. After the elections, the same Kiril Rogov, mention the following two hypotheses in his analysis regarding the behaviour of the Russian citizens:

1. *“...the annexation of Crimea, the war with Ukraine, and geopolitical tensions with the West have raised Putin's popularity to the point that it is equal across society: the*

capital and the big cities now support the president just as much as the peripheral towns and rural regions do.”²⁰

2. “...we are dealing with a new type of manipulation. All analysts, including those in the Kremlin, expected lower turnout. In light of these expectations, a colossal voter-information program was rolled out. Kremlin sources report that a “five points of contact” system was designed for maximum voter coverage: the regional administrations had to ensure that large businesses would secure their employees’ turnout for the election.”²¹

Domestic propaganda was one of the key elements of the electoral campaign. However, for the international public opinion, it was important to have access to a different point of view, a qualitative alternative to the results presented by Moscow. International forums have provided space for debate on other figures or opinions. On April 16, 2018²², at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues²³, the Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, Akhtem Chygoz, presented some numbers about the vote of the Tatars in annexed Crimea. According to the Ukrainian press²⁴, which is citing Akhtem Chygoz, the Crimean Tatars did not take part in the voting in the so-called “elections” of the Russian president in the temporarily occupied Crimea, which took place. These data, however, are lost for Russians in the general results presented by the Russian authorities, responsible for organizing the presidential election. For Kremlin, ethnicity did not matter in the Crimea. It only counted the final number, because it allowed them to present to the public the reconfirmation of supporting the annexation act inside the country.

- How Russian citizens voted in other states with "territorial problems"?

In other regions where Russian troops are stationed, Vladimir Putin also achieved the highest results. Thus, most of the voters in Transnistria voted in favour of Vladimir Putin - 96.4%. The number of Russian citizens who participated in the vote was 73 947 - a record participation of the Transnistrians in the electoral processes in Russia comparing to 2012, when only 50,368 citizens voted²⁵. Delegated observers did not record complaints and information on violation of the voting procedure.

²⁰ Putin’s Reelection: Capturing Russia’s Electoral Patterns | A Discussion with Kirill Rogov, PonarsEurasia, June 07, 2018, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/point-counter/article/putins-reelection-capturing-russias-electoral-patterns-discussion-kirill-rogov>

²¹ Ibidem.

²², 17th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues - Situation of Human Rights in Crimea, Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations in New-York, April 16, 2018, <http://ukraineun.org/en/press-center/311-17th-session-of-the-united-nations-permanent-forum-on-indigenous-issues-situation-of-human-rights-in-crimea/>

²³ *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*, Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, April 16, 2018, <http://qtmm.org/en/news/5898-united-nations-permanent-forum-on-indigenous-issues>

²⁴ Чийгоз рассказал в ООН, как Кремль "нарисовал" явку крымских татар на выборах, UkrInform, April 16, 2018, Kyiv, <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-crimea/2442966-cijgoz-rasskazal-v-oon-kak-kreml-narisoval-avku-krymskih-tatar-na-vyborah.html>

²⁵ În regiunea transnistreană, 96,4% dintre alegători au votat pentru Vladimir Putin, Diez, March 19, 2018, <http://diez.md/2018/03/19/regiunea-transnistreana-964-dintre-alegatori-au-votat-pentru-vladimir-putin/>

Vladimir Putin also has obtained the highest support from electors in de-facto Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to Georgian media outlets, the number of votes for Putin in Abkhazia was 39,427, or 94.21% of the total number of votes. In South Ossetia, he won about 17,500 votes, or 92.8% of the vote²⁶.

The constant growth in voter numbers is explained by several factors: the propaganda, the attention paid by the regime to these regions, and the policy of granting Russian citizenship to those who had Soviet passports.

- ***External election observation missions:***

The March 2018 elections registered a record number of international observers - over 1300. This number does not show the openness of the regime or the improvement of the electoral process. Before the election, several international non-governmental organizations failed to register their observers. For example, the German European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE)²⁷ was listed as an undesirable organization. EPDE members say that through these actions Russia is being isolated and becoming increasingly restrictive in terms of citizens' rights and freedoms. The note provided by the OSCE observation mission, although it has a more positive tone, highlights a number of abuses by the authorities against fundamental human rights. Michael Georg Link, Special Coordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission, reported the following:

*“Choice without real competition, as we have seen here, is not a real choice. The Central Election Commission's professional and efficient administration of the technical aspects of the election deserves recognition.”*²⁸

Similar violations, as well as the procedure violations, were documented by Golos – an independent Association elections watchdog²⁹. The reports submitted by members of this association have different content from some of "guest observers".

Different views were presented by political engaged observers. Elie Hatem³⁰, lawyer and councilor of Jean-Marie Le Pen, an international observer at the Russian elections, said at the

²⁶ Putin Secures Over 90% Of The Vote In Occupied Abkhazia And South Ossetia, Georgia Today, March 20, 2018, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/9564/Putin-Secures-Over-90%25-Of-The-Vote-In-Occupied-Abkhazia-And-South-Ossetia>

²⁷ Russia lists German NGO European Platform for Democratic Elections as undesirable, DW, March 14, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-lists-german-ngo-european-platform-for-democratic-elections-as-undesirable/a-42974765>

²⁸ Russian presidential election well administered, but characterized by restrictions on fundamental freedoms, lack of genuine competition, international observers say, OSCE, March 19, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/375661>

²⁹ Russian police put the squeeze on election observers before the vote, the Guardian, March 17, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/17/russian-police-put-the-squeeze-on-election-observers-before-vote>

³⁰ (Video) Независимые иностранные наблюдатели о качестве организации выборного процесса в России, ITAR-TASS, March 19, 2018,

press conference following the elections that Russia is the leader of the new world order, a free new world order. Gian Luigi Ferretti³¹, secretary general of UGL, an international observer, said in turn that he had seen a celebration of democracy... (...) and these elections were free and democratic.

The invited observers had the mission to "reward" the Kremlin for supporting the political forces they represent in their countries of origin. In the absence of equidistant observers, they filled the "empty space" with information appropriate to the governing regime.

Problem 4: What to expect?

In his speech delivered to the Federation Council³², which was part of his presidential campaign, Vladimir Putin presented the guidelines for his future presidential mandate. A strategy to implement these priorities was made public later in May 2018³³. Vladimir Putin presented the results of social and economic policies from an optimistic perspective, with sustainable policies, stable macroeconomic indicators and resilient public institutions. He also wanted to emphasize the defensive behaviour that Russia is forced to adopt in its relationship with Western partners who do not respect the interests of the Kremlin. At the same time, these arguments allowed the Russian president to make a demonstration of power, to showcase the new military technological results. This part of the speech - about Russia's military response - was also for the external consumer of information. Internal audiences only have to agree with such presentations.

Officially, after the presidential election in March 2018, nothing has changed in Russia. The centre of power and political decision remained the privilege of Vladimir Putin and his allies. Dmitry Trenin³⁴ says the Russian president's power is absolute, and it is confirmed by the great popularity and vast experience that Vladimir Putin has obtained in the struggle to reconfirm Russia's status of great power on the international stage. This struggle against the West, and especially against the US as the main actor in international relations, will continue. Positioning as an opponent for US interests in the world is convenient in order to keep the domestic audience distracted from structural problems in the economy. External image loss can also be explained. Costs are not too high if they allow the political system to remain coagulated around a political figure. Vladimir Putin has managed to build a loyal system. Those who oppose (the West) this system are doing nothing but testing the resilience of the political regime by sanctions and promoting their own interests in different regional files.

The current leadership in Moscow does not feel the need to withdraw from various regional files, even if their presence within them is extremely expensive for some members of

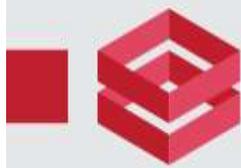
https://www.facebook.com/tassagency/videos/1809730859095999/?hc_ref=ARRKq0qMTJrR8ZpD8laYSFdq8_Wb-alTpHi-niW_mxMPruMbGxRVzGoulyM3BKidsZc

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, Kremlin,ru, March 01, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

³³ Шестилетку — за тринадцать проектов, Kommersant.ru, May 15, 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3628758>

³⁴ Dmitri Trenin, Заглядывая на пять лет вперед. Кто будет определять внешнюю политику России, Carnegie Moscow Center, April 02, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75901>



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the president's team. Four years after the annexation of Crimea, only a few are those who decided for themselves that they need options to get out of the circle of decision-makers in Moscow.

This presidential mandate will have as its starting point the preservation of the image of an actor capable of arguing its position on the international stage by selectively applying the rules and principles of international law, by not respecting bi- or multilateral commitments, by propaganda, and by undermining democratic institutions in countries where strategic interests have been developed.

Conclusions

During these presidential elections, Vladimir Putin and the people who support him have organized a show to legitimize their presence at the head of the state and to demonstrate to the international opinion the Russian people trust in their leader and that things in Russia are heading in the right direction. All the nation's shortcomings have an external origin.

This presidential mandate will not be different from the last one. Vladimir Putin will continue to be cynical with the opposition that he is trying to discredit, promoting it as a small mass of people who oppose qualitative change or as a group of people easily manipulated by their own leaders. Another tactic will be to invite the opposition to take part in the sharing of economic benefits.

We are witnessing the implementation of the power-management plan by a small circle of people who ensure through their actions the continuity of the regime, the firmness to act in the design of a powerful actor image with multiple capabilities and options that can requires the reformation of international fora, such as the UN, or may call for the creation of the Great Eurasia Project.

The messages to be paid attention by external partners are the ones presented on March 01, 2018 to the Federation Council: Russia is strong, Russia is recovering from the economic crisis, sanctions have not worked, foreign intimidation is not profiled, Russia is an actor who needs to be courted and appreciated.

This is the reason why the only aim for foreign partners in the Russian elections was to avoid a more serious scenario that would exclude all international observers (not only representatives of CSOs, but also representatives of intergovernmental organizations), thus further diminishing the capacity to analyze the processes and phenomena that the Russian society is going through.

Democratic institutions in Russia are too fragile to reinvent themselves without consistent support from citizens. For this, a new political elite is needed to succeed. But, in order to become

a political alternative, the new opposition will have to decide if they want to be in charge with the state affairs. None of the candidates went to fight with the idea of winning this election.

In analyzing the electoral protesters in the Russian Federation, special attention must be paid to the behavioral changes of the electorate. The Russian voters became more selective in a negative way. They were educated and encouraged not to have a "critical thinking" approach to electoral platforms. It is more convenient for a citizen to make a decision, without feeling frustrated by the lack of a real alternative. Thus, they are exempt from involvement and passes responsibility to a leader who has given Russia a strong state image.

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