

Putin: Consummate Illiberal or Embryonic Anti-Liberal?

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“P utinology” has become a popular theme in *Demokratizatsiya*. Virginie Coulloudon concludes that Putin’s “vertical state” was a reflection of a wide segment of the elite who believed economic reforms could be implemented better through top-down governance.¹ Eugene Huskey argues that this verticality may create more discipline in the short-term, but its long-term effects are still vague and potentially negative.² John Squier argues that Putin’s goal is *gosudarstvennost’*, or strengthening of the state, which is neutral and eventually, in theory, could help the horizontal, civil-society forces.³ Theodore Karasik recalls the Andropovite and *siloviki* banners raised by Putin early in his administration to create a new national ideal based on great-power ideology.⁴ Thomas Granville adds that Putin was pursuing *derzhavnost’* and the recentralization of the state as an end in itself (eschewing perhaps more practical and ultimately more beneficial federal models).⁵ Nikolas Gvosdev’s assessment is one of “managed democracy,” where he compares Putin’s rule to Mexico under the Industrial Revolutionary Party (PRI)—a façade of democracy clouding elite manipulations, corruption, and unrepresentative government.⁶ Following this corporatist vein, Donald Jensen uses a form of Graham Allison’s “bureaucratic politics paradigm” to argue that Putin is forced to balance several competing interests he inherited to carve his policy.⁷ Robert Orttung evaluates Putin’s federal reforms as a use of the law for political purposes rather than the implementation of the rule of law⁸ (although, as Robert Sharlet argues, not without meeting stiff legal resistance at all levels⁹). Gordon Hahn agrees, adding that the Putin federal reforms “are creating again an unstable tectonic inside the Russian state,” with potentially perilous implications, including the rise of Muslim radicalism in Russia.¹⁰ Emil Pain notes that Russia’s electorate expects democratic regression from Putin after having sensed that “democracy” was responsible for Russia’s malaise.¹¹

Many of these authors are losing faith in the idea that Putin’s vertical state, *derzhavnost’* or *gosudarstvennost’*, will have a positive overriding aim over time. Also, many years before Putin came to power, several *Demokratizatsiya* authors—most notably J. Michael Waller—repeatedly, prophetically, and unfashionably at the time, raised the specter of a KGB state, warning of its danger to early Russian democratic development.¹²

In this and upcoming issues, contributors discuss a more anti-liberal (as opposed to simply illiberal) side of Putin.

In an interview, Grigory Yavlinsky, founder and leader of Yabloko (the main liberal Russian party) discusses Putin's anti-liberal imperial ideology.

Mikhail Beliaev studies Russia's regions, in a broader context of literature from other post-Communist transitions to question the effectiveness of Putin's "strong hand" tactics to bring economic prosperity.

John Dunlop's analysis of the influential Eurasianist, or *Evrasiistvo* (a phenomenon first described in *Demokratizatsiya* in 1992 by Victor Yasmann¹³), proponent Aleksandr Dugin and his influence on key players in Russia follows.

Despite his current popularity, the odds are against Putin ushering in lasting prosperity or legality, as Beliaev concludes here. With rare exception, all the post-Communist leaders who hailed from the Communist structures and who did not follow in office a non-Communist leader were associated with state failure, corruption, illegality, and economic stagnation.¹⁴ Putin hails from similar structures as did his predecessor and others, including Ion Iliescu, Vladmír Mečiar, Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Nursultan Nazarbaev, Mircea Snegur, Islam Karimov, Slobodan Milošević, and Franjo Tuđman.

In elections, media, civil society, and relations with the United States, Putin's Russia has regressed in comparison to the late Gorbachev period. Nikolai Zlobin argued for the best interests of Putin's Russia as a dignified junior partner of the United States,¹⁵ but this possibility appears to be receding amid Putin's miscalculations and his growing unpopularity in Washington.¹⁶ Bruce Jackson, a prominent adviser to the Bush administration, reflected this tendency with his article "The Failure of Putin's Russia" in the *Washington Post*.¹⁷ However, there will always be those in Washington who admire foreign autocrats, which may explain the State Department's continuing endorsement of Putin's imperial designs on tiny Moldova.

Yavlinsky and other critics may have a point in asserting that Putin, more than "managed democracy," represents both the substance and the façade of an anti-liberal force. This is a force that seeks to consume vestiges of political liberalism in Russia in a compulsive, arbitrary, and ultimately aimless way, while altogether infringing on other countries' sovereignty.

A more optimistic scenario presents itself in Georgia and Belarus. In this issue, a leading analyst walks us through the complex party development factors that led to Shevardnadze's fall there, and the original democratic leader shares with us some interesting, yet not well-known, facts about Belarus's past and present. Georgia is entering a brave new world of *post*-post-Soviet democratization, and Belarus may become the next surprise.

In keeping with the *Demokratizatsiya* tradition, this issue also includes historical articles: a reassessment of Chernobyl as a catalyst for Soviet reform and a comparison of the founding presidents of the post-Soviet states. An interview with one of those founding presidents, Stanislau Shushkevich, also includes relevant historical material, including details of his summit at the Belovezhsky Forest, which dissolved the USSR.

We are pleased once again to offer an essay of book reviews from Johanna Granville, this time discussing the horrors of human trafficking.

Finally, this issue contains a tribute to Yabloko deputy Yuri Shchekochikhin, a longtime board member of *Demokratizatsiya*, who died under mysterious circumstances during his investigation of a KGB-connected business. We commemorate his life and work.

NOTES

1. Virginie Coulloudon, "Vladimir Putin's Vertical State and the Embryo of a Horizontal Opposition," *Demokratizatsiya* 8, no. 4 (2000): 421–38.

2. Eugene Huskey, "On the Future of the Russian State," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 1 (2003): 115–21.

3. John Squier, "Civil Society and the Challenge of Russian *Gosudarstvennost*," *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 2 (2002): 166–83.

4. Theodore Karasik, "Putin and Shoigu: Reversing Russia's Decline," *Demokratizatsiya* 8, no. 2 (2000): 178–185.

5. Thomas E. Graham, Jr., "The Fate of the Russian State," *Demokratizatsiya* 8, no. 3 (2000): 371.

6. Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "Mexico and Russia: Mirror Images?" *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no. 4 (2002): 488–508.

7. Donald N. Jensen, "Working with the Russians," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 2 (2003): 223–28. Although Jensen concentrates mostly on foreign policy decision making, his analysis also overlaps with domestic policymaking, such as the war in Chechnya.

8. Robert Orttung, "Putin's Federal Reform Package: A Recipe for Unchecked Kremlin Power," *Demokratizatsiya* 9, no. 3 (2001): 341–49.

9. Robert Sharlet, "Resisting Putin's Federal Reforms on the Legal Front," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 3 (2003): 335–42.

10. Gordon M. Hahn, "The Past, Present and Future of the Russian Federal State," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 3 (2003): 343–62.

11. Emil Pain, "'Back to the USSR?': New Trends in Russian Regional Policy," *Demokratizatsiya* 9, no. 2 (2001): 182–92. Putin's illiberal foreign policy as a manifestation of voter attitudes was also discussed by Stanislaw Shushkevich, "Belarus: Self-Identification and Statehood," *Demokratizatsiya* 8, no. 3 (2000): 295.

12. For the contributions of J. Michael Waller, who also served as associate editor of this journal, see for example "When Will Democrats Control the Former KGB?" *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 1 (1992): 27–40; "Russia's Legal Foundations for Civil Repression," *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 3 (1993): 110–15; "Post-Soviet Sakharovs: Renewed Persecution of Dissident Scientists and the American Response," *Demokratizatsiya* 2, no. 1 (1994): 138–47; "Organized Crime and the Russian State," *Demokratizatsiya* 2, no. 3 (1994): 364–84. See also Vladimir Abarinov, "More Troubled Waters in the KGB Archives," *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 2 (1992): 41–48; Keith Armes, "Checkists in Cassocks: The Orthodox Church and the KGB," *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 4 (1993): 72–83; Galina Starovoitova, "Yeltsin Misread the Elections," *Demokratizatsiya* 2, no. 2 (1994): 178–93; Yuri Shchekochikhin, "Where Does the 'Mafiya' Come From?" *Demokratizatsiya* 2, no. 2 (1994): 191–94; Louise Shelley, "Post-Soviet Organized Crime," *Demokratizatsiya* 2, no. 3 (1994): 341–58; Boris Pustintsev, "Russian Political Police: Immortal Traditions and Eternal Threats," *Demokratizatsiya* 4, no. 4 (1996): 531–37. Several arguments along these lines were also raised at several *Demokratizatsiya*-sponsored or co-sponsored conferences by Father Gleb Yakunin, Sergei Grigoryants, Lev Ponomarev, Arseny Roginsky, and several others. (Kate Martin's prestigious Washington-based project on supporting the reform of post-communist secret police structures was born from these efforts.) See for example, Fredo Arias-King "On the Path to Reforming the KGB: Proposals and Projects," *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 1 (1992): 98–110.

Demokratizatsiya published important archival materials on the KGB's role in the 1991 coup, transcripts that had been suppressed in Russia: "Transcript of the Hearings 'Concerning the Role of Repressive Organs in the Putsch of 19–21 August 1991,'" *Demokratizatsiya* 3, no. 4 (1995): 419–50. *Demokratizatsiya* also invited policymakers from other post-communist countries with firsthand experience in successfully reforming vestigial political police structures. See for example Joachim Gauck, "Disposing of the Stasi Legacy," *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 3 (1993): 104–07; Jaroslav Basta, "Dismantling the Czechoslovak Secret Police," *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 3 (1993): 108–09.

13. Victor Yasmann, "Red Religion: An Ideology of Neo-Messianic Russian Imperialism," *Demokratizatsiya* 1, no. 2 (1992): 20–40.

14. For example, see Fredo Arias-King, "The Centrality of Elites," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 1 (2003): 150–60.

15. Nikolai Zlobin, "The United States, Russia and the New Challenges," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 1 (2003): 44–50.

16. This is discussed in Nikolai Zlobin, "Vse po drugomu," *Izvestiya*, 30 December 2003.

17. Bruce P. Jackson, "The Failure of Putin's Russia," *The Washington Post*, 28 October 2003.