

Maryana Prokop

"Движение по спирали.
Политическая система России в
ряду других систем", Дмитрий
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REVIEWS

Maryana Prokop

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

(rev.) **Дмитрий Фурман, *Движение по спирали. Политическая система России в ряду других систем*, Москва 2010, pp. 168 [Dmitrij Furman, *The Movement of the Spiral. The Political System of Russia among Other Systems*, “Ves Mir” Publishing House, Moskwa 2010]**

In his analysis of the transformations of the political system of the Russian Federation, Russian political scientist Dmitrij Furman writes that following the disintegration of the USSR, it is not possible to consider the Russian state as the so-called “transforming society” moving from communism to democracy. According to Furman, Russia is the only European state in which there was no political rotation during the entire post-communist period. One should search for causes that make Russia different from other countries in the genesis of the independent Russian Federation. The political system of Russia came into existence as a result of crisis and collapse of the communist system of the USSR (which resulted from the fiasco of Gorbachev’s attempts to restructure the state in a democratic manner) and coming into power of the ideological democratic move headed by Boris Yeltsin, the first President of the Russian Federation.

The reviewed publication analyses the process of coming into existence, development, and the current condition of the political system of Russia. Furman analyses the Russian system in comparison with other systems, in particular with the Soviet system and states that belong to the Commonwealth of Independent States. The work consists of five chapters that describe: 1) the collapse of the Soviet system and rise of new political systems; 2) the development of the political system of Russia; 3) “the golden age” – the developed system; 4) the growth of contradictions in the system and its road to crisis; 5) possible directions of crisis development (summary). The author reaches a conclusion that the political system of Russia is “related” to the post-Soviet regimes formed in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and other countries after the collapse of the USSR.

The author describes these systems as “imitating democracies”. They reflect the level of the socio-political development of the country. The transition of Russia to a new political order, according to the researcher, still requires a considerable amount of time.

It will be connected not solely with the process of evolution, but also with a number of state crises (in spite of earlier preparations of the Russian society), which may have a revolutionary character, because the society will be faced with a new task – to choose the state authorities independently for the first time. In a sense, it is a turning point which is connected not only with changes in ideology, but, above all, with changes in the thinking of the society. In the majority of the post-Soviet countries, there were attempts to seek the so-called alternative democracy, since in their cases undemocratic regimes were transformed, although it is not possible to call these regimes democracies.

Furman's approach suggests that, on the one hand, the process of development of democratic states through seeking alternative routes does not always end with transforming regimes into democracies and that this transformation may be accompanied by a crisis, which in itself may become an impetus for change; on the other hand, however, this crisis may lead to a division and the return to the previous concept.

In itself, crisis creates a range of possibilities and alternative developments; the main opportunity of a crisis (associated with Russia's entering the transformation route) will not be the transition to free election system and rotation of power, but the form of said transformation. The political scientist thinks that this will become possible only when "the political force" in Russia will mature and be able to oppose the pressures of the "ruling party", take part in elections, will not try to seize power through undemocratic methods, and shall aim to integrate the state with the western structures while maintaining the unity of the state (understood here in the context of the Russian native territory and the territory of those nations which do not display separatist aspirations; Furman doubts whether accession of Russia with Chechnya or Dagestan to Europe would be possible). The "birth" of such a "political force" could be defined as the emergence of signs of democracy in the state.

If the above will not happen, the crisis can cause disintegration and collapse of the state when the "ruling party" shall compete with the "opposition", particular regions shall not be subject to the legitimization of the centre, and, potentially, small territories of these regions may enable easier implementation of the system of political rotation and make the task of integration easier for the West. From the point of view of the West, both variants are equal; however, unpredictable elements of control and chaos pose a threat, but, as Furman claims, in favourable conditions they may be reduced to a minimum and not accompany the crisis at all.

However, maintaining unity will be a more beneficial variant for Russia. The political scientist asks whether it is possible that through integration of the Russian state with the Western structures the unity of the state as a whole shall be maintained and what forms will the crisis assume and what will be its results; he notices that the outcome depends on many factors, including also the awareness of the internal logic of the political system of the Russian state both in Russia as well as in the West. The Russian political scientist writes that since the fall of the Soviet Union and the communist system a lot of time has passed; during that period all of the countries that indeed wanted to make a transition to democracy were able to do so. To quote the words of Samuel Huntington,

democracy is a system based on common “game rules” in which there is a constant alternation between winners and losers, according to the free choice of electors. The author of the publication states that if one were to adopt Huntington’s point of view, one should recognize that none of the post-Soviet countries has made a decisive step towards democracy. With the exception of the Baltic countries, in the period starting from 1991 only five cases where the opposition assumed power in a peaceful manner were recorded (three in Moldova, one in Belarus, and one in Ukraine).

Furman thinks that in the contemporary world we are dealing with two dominating types of democracy. The first type is real democracy, typical of developed countries; the second is the system of directed or the so-called “imitating” democracy, characterized by a strong position of the head of state and a lack of fulfilment of the principles of real democracy (i.e. democratic camouflage).

The researcher claims that systems of the “imitating democracy” differ from undemocratic systems of other types – unconstitutional monarchies based on tradition; open dictatorships based on the military without democratic camouflage; and totalitarian systems with minimal camouflage, since these systems are based on their ideology of alternative democracy. Eastern European countries differ from Central European ones in that the former throughout the entire period of their functioning had virtually no experience of contemporary democracy (for example, Ukraine has greater experience than Russia, which is connected with the huge role in the Ukrainian self-awareness of the tradition associated with the formation of the Cossack state).

The consolidation of the Russian transformations (the stage of passage from undemocratic to democratic forms of government) is hampered by the fact that these transformations were simultaneous to other difficult transitions: firstly, the passage from socialist economy to market economy; secondly, the transition from the Soviet empire to the contemporary state. The genesis of “imitating democracy” in the Eastern European countries proves that these states are markedly different from the countries of Central Europe; the main difference is the fact that they are created by the people who were in power at the end of the “Soviet age”, associated, for example, with the democratic movement of Boris Yeltsin in Russia, Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan, etc.

In Georgia and Azerbaijan presidential imitating democracies that emerged as a result of coups, ended the rule of revolutionary presidents. However, the governments of Leonid Kuchma and Alexander Lukashenko came into existence after the first peaceful and democratic rotation of power, which, in theory, could lead to consolidation of the rule of law in these countries. “Imitating democracy” regimes are established not only due to certain conditions (unpreparedness of the state to the consolidation of democracy) and the evolution of mass awareness (aspiration to leave the revolutionary chaos behind and proceed to stabilization). Such regimes are not established with democratic tools.

To sum up, one should state that this is a work is sound on the factual level and may constitute a background for further deliberations on the evolution of the political system of Russia after the fall of the USSR. An advantage of the publication is that

the author mentioned some controversial issues (“inconvenient” for the contemporary Russian policy) such as separatist and independence movements. The Russian political scientist quotes the famous words of Boris Yeltsin he delivered in 1990: “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow”; and presents his subsequent change of view in 1993. The President of the Russian Federation claimed: firstly, absolute sovereignty does not exist. The law of every republic restricts the law of other members of the Federation. Secondly, the sovereignty of republics being members of the Russian Federation is reduced to maintain Russia as an integral and indivisible state (see pp. 66–67). An another controversial issue is the second Chechen war. The Russian political scientist in a balanced argument states that in 1996 the government tried to “protect” itself from all unpredictable events and that the second Chechen war was an example of such “safety measures”, which begun with equally dark events – bomb attacks in Moscow, assault in Ryazan (called the training of the FSB), and Chechen encroachment on Dagestan.

An another advantage of this book is the analysis of the political systems of Eastern European countries in the context of the research on the theoretical category of “imitating democracy”. He defines it as a regime which is headed towards democracy, but “got stuck” on a certain stage and in which democratic standards were not fully consolidated. Furman in his work makes an analysis of the course of the evolution of the Russian system after the disintegration of the USSR; on the one hand, he claims that this system is changing, on the other – he thinks that the Russian Federation still needs a considerable amount of time to enter the so-called “stage of the passage”, i.e. the evolution towards democracy. An advantage of such an approach is perceiving the process of evolution from one ideal type to another in the context of fundamental factors that influence it. The political scientist identifies crisis as one of such factors; he notices that while it is identified as an impulse for democratic transformations, it may as well cause regression to authoritarianism.

Furman makes an analysis of the “imitating democracy”, which means that his deliberations focus on the genesis of this phenomenon, and the question why do such systems do not transform into real democracies. Making an analysis of the Russian political system, Furman reaches a conclusion that its “golden age” has already passed and that it is heading towards collapse and future crisis; he also presents the possible directions of the development of that crisis.

The only fault of this work is the limited scope of the theoretical analysis of the “imitating democracies”; the researcher focuses on the analysis in the practical aspect on the example of the political system of Russia and some regimes of the former USSR.