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Political Activity of Russians: Current Trends and Resources of Media Influence

IVAN V. RADIKOV, ALEXANDRA I. RADUSHINSKAYA, SVETLANA S. MOROZOVA &
VLADIMIR G. BELOUS
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Authors assume that in the post-Soviet time, political consciousness among the Russians has significantly changed. Causes of this not only include general depoliticization in the society, but also a modified nature of the media influence. The research purpose is to search for reasons that cause booms and falls in the interest of the Russians in politics. The methodological framework of the research included the Verba-Pye model of engagement in politics, Lipset's conclusions about citizens' engagement in political affairs; assumptions from the Lipset-Rokkan model of political preferences of citizens; Scott's concept of imitation of political activism, and Bryant's conclusions about specifics of media influence on public opinion. The empirical basis of the research includes data from sociological and marketing research made by Russian centers for the study of public opinion. As a result of the research, its authors have established that country residents do not mostly show high political engagement and civil activism.

Keywords: Political interest, political activity, political inaction, political imitation, depressive society, media

Political interest and citizens' political participation appear to be necessary attributes of developed democracy. Interest in politics shapes citizens' attitude to political participation, as well as encourages its formation, functioning, and development. In this connection, the phenomenon of taking part in the social and political life has long become a theoretical research subject. For the past 60 years (from the mid-50s of the 20th century to the present days), several trends in the interpretation of political participation have been formulated. First and foremost political participation is analyzed: as political culture indicator (Almond & Verba, 1963); from the viewpoint of the participatory democracy conception (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984). Also political participation is interpreted as a means of maintaining the social system balance, providing the possibility for the broad layers of population to influence politics, and implementing democracy (the structural functionalism supporters: R. Merton (Merton, 1996), S. Lipset (Lipset, 1967)). Clearly, political participation is regarded as the manifestation of rivalry and fight, the way of negative emotions channeling (conflict theory followers (Darendorf, 2002)); as personal development condition and political socialization element (Rozenstone & Hansen, 1993). The Theoroll's approach is of a considerable research interest. Theoroll proposed five criteria for political engagement: participation in elections, political consumption, membership or active participation in political institutions, protest activism, contact-associated activities (contacting public servants) (Teoroll, Torcal, & Montero, 2007: 334-357).

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Multidisciplinary research project 'Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation 2009-2012,' held at the initiative of the European Union and focused on studies of activism in politics and civic engagement in nine European countries, also confirms relevance of the research subject. As a result of the research project, authors developed a multi-level model for the process of civil and political engagement, referred to in *The Political and Civic Engagement and Participation: Towards an Integrative Perspective* edited by Barrett (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014: 5-28). In Russia, the activity approach (Goncharov, 1997; Selivanova, 2017; Radikov, 2015, 2016) is the dominating one in the political participation analysis.

The above mentioned trends can serve now as the reliable methodological basis for finding a specific component of the political participation phenomenon. However, each of them allows analyzing solely one of the several structural peculiarities of the phenomenon. The systematic approach is needed for the integral and comprehensive consideration of this problem. Moreover, these trends let a researcher observe and explain deeds; political activity (in its implicit and potential state) remains out of sight. The matter is that, in the modern conditions, human activity, pushed out of the visual realm of politics, becomes an object in the virtual space (the Internet) and remains the integral property of the human being. Finally, not all provisions of these conceptions (theories) can be mechanically used for the analysis of the Russian political reality.

One should admit that, in politics, there are no generally accepted and proven theories of political participation which take into account the influence of the spiritual components of transforming society on its citizens' political activity; there is no thorough scientific analysis devoted to the impact of intensifying social stratification, inequality, and poverty.

In a review of the causes for falls and declines in activism of Russian citizens, we proceed from results of Bryant's research, who analysed theoretical structures of media influence of the today's type: socio-cognitive theory, 'use-satisfaction' theory, and cultivation hypothesis (Bryant, 2002).

In our study, we proceed from the assumption that politics in Russia sometimes has an imitative character: democratic institutions acquire decorative and fictive traits. These institutions are often decried as pseudo-parliament, pseudo-election, pseudo-justice, pseudo-free mass media, pseudo-publicity, and pseudo-parties.

The theoretical basis for considering this aspect is the conceptions of the correlation between the imagined and the real (Berger & Luckmann, 1966); social imitation (Zinovyev, 2006; Toschenko, 2015; Shalyugina, 2011); simulation and simulacrum (Baudrillard 1981; Deleuze, 1998). Referring to these conceptions, many Russian researchers often write about imitating activity of the authority representatives. For instance, T. Shalyugina reflects upon imitation of the party system and political rivalry (2011); S. Pshizova looks into the issue of imitation in political practice (2004); A. Margulev analyses the essence of the imitating state (2008); M. Leontiev gives a general characteristic of the Russian political system as imitation of the generally accepted "civilized liberal standard" (2014).

Virtually all researchers of this problem begin with the fact that the imitation is usually applied by the administrative bureaucracy in order to persuade the population of positive changes that take place due to its initiative or under its guidance. In this work, we assert that citizens themselves often imitate these or those social roles in their daily life. They imitate political backing of certain political power, leader, and rather often—political party membership.

The hypothesis of the study is the decline in political interest among the significant part of the Russians, especially among the youth, is due to the depressive character of the

contemporary Russian society, deepening and unprecedented social stratification, persisting poverty, inequality, unfair national wealth distribution, and poor performance of political media projects. In such conditions, the political activity is often of the imitating character. The aim of the study is to discover the reasons behind the ever-changing interest of the Russians in politics and political activity imitation. To reach this aim, the following tasks are consecutively accomplished in this work:

- (i) To reveal the influence of the country's authoritarian legacy on the political activity.
- (ii) To establish the place of politics in today's values of the Russian people.
- (iii) To uncover the reasons behind the correlation between the imitating activity and the Russian tradition.
- (iv) There is a review of the role of resources of media influence on development of political activity.

Literature Review and Methodology

Lipset's statement that "the participation of members belonging to any organisation or of citizens as society members taking part in political affairs is neither necessary nor sufficient condition for ordinary, unnoticeable people's influence on politics of the mentioned organisation or a country's government" (Lipset, 2016: 215). Today the logic of his argumentation is thought to be accepted for understanding the peculiarities of Russian politics. On the one hand, the citizens demonstrating a low level of political activity can have an impact on politics by the very ability to underpin (or refuse to do it) this or that faction struggling for power. On the other hand, the citizens showing intense political activity, attending various meetings, conventions and demonstrations, as well as participating in elections, can hardly affect politics. Lipset also formulates an important warning for the power. He writes: "If members of an organisation or citizens of a country do not demonstrate any 'political' activity, then they evade the influence of the power that controls them" (Lipset, 2016: 215). This thesis is believed to refer to non-democratic regimes.

The assumptions of Lipset-Rokkan's classical "genetic" model, according to which citizens' political preferences are predetermined by the combination of the five conditions: social status, income level, residence, education, and religion (Lipset, Rokkan, 1967). Recognizing that today these conditions are still relevant, we should also note the fairness of the assertion of P. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues that electoral choice is primarily influenced by the voter's solidarity with a particular social group rather than their individual preferences (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1969: 148). Equally important is the hypothesis of the "rational choice" theory followers who believe that the degree of every person's participation in politics depends on the potential profit from it.

Our analysis is also based on the dealing with participation (or non-involvement) in various elections as a criterion for measuring the level of political activity, and the citizens' attitude to political institutions, leaders and parties—for measuring political activity's valuable and psychological level. Nietzsche's postulate about human inclination to pretend, "the habit to masquerade, conventionality, acting out in public and for yourself" (Nietzsche, 2005) plays an important role in the methodology of the research. For the purposes of our analysis we consider political activity imitation as a specific protection function in the conditions of political pressure, routine form of resistance, specific diversity of "the weapon of the weak" (Scott, 1996).

We should also specify Bryant's conclusions that support the fact that an external environment, individual differences, psychological factors, and characteristics of social groups directly affect perception and use of information.

The authors' methodology is influenced by "The Society of the Spectacle" by Guy-Ernest Debord (1999) and the paradigm of game-ization by S. Kravchenko (2002). The empirical base of the study is sociological and marketing research data from the Russian centres for public opinion study (the Institute of Sociology of the RAS, All-Russia Public Opinion Research Centre (VCIOM), Levada-Centre, the Public Opinion Foundation).

Results

Authoritarian Syndrome as Political Activity Brake

The level of the Russian citizens' participation in politics is still conditioned by the hybrid character of the Russian political system—the combination of democratic institutes' elements and authoritarian methods of ruling. Today's Russia is perceived by the West as the state with rapidly developing authoritarian characteristics. As far back as 2012, the British newspaper *Economist Intelligence Unit*, while ranking countries by their democracy development level, put Russia on the 122nd place and classified its regime as authoritarian. In 2016, confirming the tendency of escalating authoritarianism in Russia, the same research gave the country the 134th place out of 167 states (the Democracy level, 2016). Fifteen years after the collapse of the USSR, R. Pipes stated that "the Russians are afraid of democracy. They do not believe that the state can be governed democratically" (Pipes, 2015: 71). Many Russian scientists who admit the dominance of nondemocratic methods in the country's political process (Dmitriev, 2011; Krasin, 2007: 260-261) agree with this evaluation explaining the phenomenon by the influence of the authoritarian syndrome (Dmitriev, 2011; Krasin, 2007). The authoritarian syndrome implies the irrational attitude to power, non-critical evaluation of the political guidance, hierarchization of the social and political space, paternalistic perception of the state, the search for an external enemy, aggressiveness, the cult of power and dignity, aspiration to see the country as a superpower (Grigorieva, 2014).

Here, we should stress that today's authoritarian tendencies reveal themselves not only in Russia. They also become noticeable in other countries that pave the way for democracy. It is obvious that it will take decades to overcome the authoritarian legacy. In these conditions, the majority of the Russian citizens do not show high civil or political activity assuming that they are not in a position to affect processes not only within the country, but also in their own city, region, house, yard, and at work. According to the data published by "Levada-Centre" in November 2017, 60 per cent of respondents do not feel any personal responsibility for what is going on in the country, and 68 per cent of them consider that they are unable to influence political processes that take place in the country. It is even more remarkable that 57 per cent of citizens assert that they are powerless to influence on-going processes in their city (region) while 28 per cent (in their house and yard), and 18 per cent (at work). Only 5 per cent of the Russians realize that have the power to affect the country's current state of affairs, and only 24 per cent of them feel a slight degree of personal responsibility for what is happening in the country (ANO "Levada-Centrâ", 2017). In addition, we should note that the majority of the respondents do not express any regrets about it. Two thirds of the Russian citizens (65 per cent) assess the situation in the country as good, i.e. they are quite satisfied with the policy conducted (VCIOM, 2017).

The aforementioned sociological indicators mirror the depressive character of the contemporary Russian society. It will not be an exaggeration to say that now-a-days the society displays a lack of social optimism, energy and common beliefs about not only the

collective, but also the individual future. The depressive tendency of this society is characterised by the spiritual vacuum of the vast part of the population caused by shifts in their lifestyle, the loss of moral values, vagueness, disappointment in the conducted policy, tiredness of unfulfilled promises given by the authorities, deepening social stratification, and worrisome expectations aroused by the escalating confrontation with the West. Such a society cannot generate extraordinary thinkers, philosophers, writers who are able to put forward great mobilizing ideas and benchmarks for the society development.

The social-environment betrays not only political apathy, but also the citizens' tiredness of politics. The population lives in growing fear apprehending changes that are associated with possible deterioration of the situation rather than with hopes for better. That is why most of the Russian citizens endorse the established social order that is perceived as stable and constant.

Is Politics No Longer a Priority in the Values of the Russian People?

Two and a half of the post-Soviet decades have significantly modified the Russian citizens' political consciousness. Today, we can confidently say that most Russians do not treat politics as a priority sphere any more. According to the data published by specialists of ANO "Levada-Centre", in 2015, only 7 per cent of the population demonstrated their active interest in politics (interested very much), and 30 per cent – moderate one (rather interested). In total, 60 per cent of respondents declared that they were not interested in politics: "rather uninterested in politics" (38 per cent) and "uninterested at all" (22 per cent). A small group of respondents (3 per cent) was uncertain about the answer (ANO "Levada-Centre", 2015).

Two years later, in 2017, opinion poll "Political Interest and Information Sources" aimed at teenagers (aged 15–17) and performed by Russia's Opinion Poll Foundation showed that 64 per cent of respondents of this age group are not interested in politics (The Public Opinion Foundation, 2017, May). Only the half of the young respondents (aged 17–34) said that they were somewhat interested in politics (The Public Opinion Foundation, 2017, April).

This situation also prevails in the social sphere. There are serious obstacles on the way towards the Russian citizens' socialisation. According to sociological opinion polls, 80.3 per cent of the Russians are not members of any social organisations; 53.5 per cent of the citizens have never taken part in any types of political life (Toshenko, 2016).

There are numerous explanations for such inaction of the Russian citizens. It should be noted that in the modern information society mass participation as a criterion for political activity, maturity, and development, is no longer as relevant as it was in the past. Due to the cutting-edge means of communication, even small but active groups of citizens can have a great impact on the life of the country, city, region, village, etc. Declining interest in "big politics" is accompanied by the latent politicization of significant segments of various subcultures and informal movements. In 2014, the Institute of Sociology of the RAS carried out a study devoted to the Russian middle class. It revealed that "non-systematic opposition, due to a great number of famous writers, musicians, journalists and actors among its members, tries to compensate the drop in the street protests by organizing public meetings, debates, lectures and concerts, thereby maintaining the interest in the political agenda that is crucial for them, as well as in the general opposition activity" (Gorshkov & Tihonova, 2016: 304). The reasons behind the low level of the Russians' political participation are the following:

- (i) The overwhelming majority of the Russians do not consider either social or political participation as “social lifts”, opportunities for personal promotion (Gorshkov&Tihonova, 2016).
- (ii) Some citizens lack values at the level of their self-understanding as full-fledged and committed members of an existing society. Many citizens exhibit aloofness not only from politics, but also from society.
- (iii) Artificially created and unfavourable for politics is the culture of provocations, or trolling that is widespread in the net communication. The point is that online forums and social networks give false, lop-sided and subjective information, create not only uncompromising attitude to many important social and political issues, but also cynic perception of political power. In this context, the statement that politics is “a dirty affair” connected with lie and violation is deeply rooted in the public consciousness.
- (iv) The effect of the ‘reached stability’ in politics. As a rule, such position is typical of the authority representatives. In 2013, S. Zheleznyak, the vice-speaker of the State Duma, Deputy Secretary of the Council General “United Russia”, talked about declining political interest as a positive tendency proving that the Russians had started “living better”. He declared that people “have started thinking more about the daily routine. Now the Russians are more focused on children, parents, work, education and healthcare rather than politics. Our citizens are engrossed in taking care of their families and well-being, they plan for the future and vacation”. And then: “The public authority system and politics have become more clear, transparent and accountable to the society. People assessed it positively, switching to other tasks. So, in these conditions, a decrease in political interest is a logical and positive process” (Zheleznyak, 2013). D. Peskov, the press secretary of Russia’s President, called the Russians’ political interest decline as a really natural and cyclic process (The Kremlin States, 2017).
- (v) Low level of political education and culture of the Russian people. Many Russian citizens limit politics to what the power representatives are engaged in (called as “they”). Since, in their opinion, this policy vector does not touch their own interests, the predominant attitude to it lies in irritation. They see politics as a means of its senseless corruption, enrichment of the people in power who service their own interests.
- (vi) Excessive consumption—typical of new Russian society cultivating the values of individualism and egoism that affect mostly the youth (Ilyin, 2014). It is also deep concentration on privacy and interpreting freedom only as freedom of individual choice.
- (vii) Russian citizens’ poverty level. As they mainly focus on the problems of physical survival, it leaves them no time and strength to participate in political activity. Thus, they are not interested in politics, do not demand political shifts in the country and do not believe in the possibility of real improvement in their social position.
- (viii) A qualitatively new structure and content of the media: marginalization of political media structures, the modified role of ‘media influence’. For today’s Russian authorities, independent decision-making is crucial therefore, attempts of pressure made by the media or public opinion are generally taken hard. The role of ‘media influence’ mainly comes down to transmission of a certain set of messages that the authorities consider necessary to bring to the notice of the society or specific groups. Online media are only focused on priorities of one of the parties, using various spin techniques. There is a growing trend towards taking the information about political processes from

various sources of information, from satellite channels to the Internet. In terms of their almost unlimited freedom, they distribute the most diverse, often not exact, and sometimes deliberately false information. An avalanche-like flow of information overlaps rather poor political awareness and culture of the population. This leads to negative judgements of an entire political process.

Alongside with that declining political interest has one more dimension. The very fact of distrust to politicians and power does not mean that citizens completely refrain from political participation of any form. Many of them still take part in all sorts of elections, meet with political leaders, join political parties and attend party conventions. Besides, a vast majority of citizens join the ruling party and imitate political activity by inertia, habit or just in case (as it was long time ago in the Soviet Union Communist Party). Some of them do it "playing" in order to provoke even more doubt among the Russian people. For instance, K. Sobchak, when talking about her "presidential ambitions", called her hypothetical presidency as "mock" or "top-level art project" (Fyodorova, 2017). It seems that the camouflaged essence of such imitated political activity is to undermine public trust in the institution of election even more. We need to point out that huge masses of the poor in Russia with their feelings of social discontent, if guided intentionally, can be converted into a force that is very dangerous to political power.

The degree of political, especially electoral activity in Russia, its selective character is explained by the established authority structure. In other words, political and civil activity of the Russian citizens is proportional to the significance of a certain political institution (civil society institution) in politics (the public life). The statistical data concerning voters' turnout in the post-Soviet time proves this logic. During this period, citizens showed the peak of activity during the presidential elections. People regard the President as the cure for all their life problems. Despite a certain decrease, this turnout is still heavy: 69.81 per cent in 1996, 68.84 per cent in 2000, 64.38 per cent in 2004, 69.6 per cent in 2008, and 65.3 per cent in 2012. The turnout in the State Duma election is much poorer, together with a faster drop: 64.76 per cent in 1995, 61.85 per cent in 1999, 55.67 per cent in 2003, 63.78 per cent in 2007, 60.1 per cent in 2011, and 47.88 per cent in 2016.

Citizens demonstrate even less interest in the election of the heads of the Federation's subjects. For example, in 2017 the minimum turnout was recorded in Tomsk oblast (25.77 per cent), Novgorod oblast (28.35 per cent), the Republic of Karelia (29.35 per cent), and the Udmurt Republic (34.55 per cent). The exception was the Republic of Mordovia, where the turnout reached 81.96 per cent.

Finally, citizens demonstrate the least interest in municipal elections. The difficulty in establishing the turnout dynamics is due to the fact that the information about the election outcome has become available on the website of the Central Election Commission only since 2009. In this connection, we should note the most alarming example. In 2017, the turnout during the election to the Councils of Deputies of Municipal Formations of the City of Moscow was only 14.82 per cent (source: RF Central Election Commission).

As citizens' political activity is a sign of legitimacy, the authorities have to be undoubtedly interested in intensifying this activity. It is unacceptable today to resort to administrative methods for resolving this problem. There is an urgent need for real political reforms that will implement the power-sharing principle both vertically and horizontally. Some changes have occurred recently. Regional and local authorities have started tackling more local problems and making improvements in cities and settlements. The practice of holding dialogues between the active part of the population and municipalities has become more widespread.

Political Activity Imitation: Tradition of Cynicism, Fear, and Obedience

The less positive changes happen in socio-economic life and politics, the usefulness of which could be realised by the majority of citizens, the more frequently the red tape applies the imitation practice in order to convince the population otherwise. The imitation is a printed in the mind and "imposed" construct of the symbolic social reality and a set of social technologies of "imposing influence" and "emotional inspiration", manipulation practices, functioning in the historical and current social reality and designated to model visibility and "plausibility" of originality (Shalyugina, 2011).

Zinovyev defined imitativeness as a property of not only the past, but also of the new social organisation of Russia characterising its essence as a whole and each component in particular. He wrote: "The imitation is a conscious action of people to create objects-imitations that, according to the initial idea, should be perceived as objects-originals... One can speak about the degree of imitativeness of the whole union, its separate events, actions of authorities and parties, etc." (Zinovyev, 2006: 429). According to his opinion, "the Russians who lived a certain part of their conscious life in the Soviet period, must remember the great role that was played by showing-off, the creation of a facade of success, all kinds of solemn performances designed to demonstrate unity, loyalty, readiness, etc., imaginary phenomena of the Soviet life style" (Zinovyev, 2006: 430). Today's Russian citizens remember the time of comprehensive, universal imitation established by the end of Leonid Brezhnev's epoch. Imitation, as not simply copying or reproduction, but as a fake and a conscious action close to pretense or simulation, to the creation of the false belief about anything, existed in all processes of social and political life of the Soviet society.

There is a rather popular statement in the modern literature, which explains the imitating character of political activity in Russia. It is about the specific anthropology of a "Soviet person", "adjusted to the repressive state and learnt to live in it at the expense of a decrease in demands, immoralism (ethical particularism) and opportunism, the skills of demonstrative loyalty to the authorities" ("Political cynicism", 2015: 140). This behaviour is often called as political cynicism. According to Gudkov, "the up-to-date Russian cynicism is generated primarily by unsuccessful attempts of democratic modifications of society and the state, the abortion character of Russia's modernisation, ... mass disappointment in the reforms and converting hopes (illusions) into the aggression against those who were previously associated with opportunities and their implementation, namely democrats, liberals, and politicians" ("Political cynicism", 2015: 141).

At the same time, we should pay attention to the fact that the masses (population, citizens) are not only passive objects of imitation practices. Even if there is no positive motivation to the performed activity, imitation can become the specific way for people to build into the changing reality and demands of the authorities. Such actions are based on two instincts that are built-in the human being: self-preservation instinct and the instinct to follow the crowd, act as the majority and be a part of society (herd behavior).

Gellner explains the nature of the support for the existing social order. In "Liberty Conditions, the Civil Society and its Historical Competitors", he underlines two important moments that characterise people's attitude to society. Firstly, the idea about justice of the social structure that is predominant among them and, secondly, credulity and insufficient criticism. The author writes: "There are people and even groups treating society rather cynically. But still, this is a rather rare case. People are more often convinced that the existing order is generally fair." To think differently, to suppose that you are trapped in the unfair public establishment, is merely inconvenient. People will treat themselves as sinners rather than condemn the public order in which they live. The feeling of personal guilt is

preferable to hatred for the universal order... It is much easier for an average person to take beliefs for granted, if other community members share them: he or she pretends to be driven by these convictions not accentuating them and not showing any particular doubts, so they expect the same from others. It is a convenient position, which satisfies most of people... The striking ease with which, under the shift in balance of power, whole peoples change their convictions indicates that these creeds are not so deep. The ease with which even the most ridiculous regimes and ideologies keep their power, proves credulity of people or, at least, their insufficient criticism" (Gellner, 1995: 147).

As for the reasons that make people hide the true causes of political activity, we also need to point out the peculiarities of the Russian political culture containing elements of social fear of possible losses due to political alterations. Dealing with fear as one of the strongest emotions emerging in case of the threat to a person's life, his or her ideals, principles and values, we should emphasize that this feeling may arise both in the real conditions and in imaginary, illusionary and false dangers that are perceived as the real ones.

Reviewing P. Boucheron and C. Robin's book "The Art of Fear", in which the authors regard the usage of fear in politics, C. Kikuchi remarks: "Fear serves as a justification for the ruling method, a political program that is designed irrespectively of citizens' feelings. Their fear can easily grow into readiness to obey the rules." To fear means to be ready to obey. She deduces that the very fear becomes a convenient means in politics that demands implicit faith (Kikuchi, 2016).

According to sociological studies, a rather high percentage of the Russian respondents are afraid of toughening the political regime and the return of mass repressions ("The Russians revealed", 2017). In this context, the state patronage ingrained in the memory of the elderly generation of the Russians as a guarantee of a living wage, as a possibility to live a hand-to-mouth existence but without making great efforts at work and, in some cases, simply imitating the useful activity, is still attractive in Russia.

There is one more circumstance which we must take into account while finding out the reasons for political activity imitation. This refers to radical individualization that, according to Z. Bauman, characterises the society of the late 20th century. The author distinguishes the three main signs: loss of control over the majority of crucial social processes; increasing vagueness and progressing vulnerability of the personality in front of uncontrollable changes; human aspiration to stop pursuing promising objectives in favor of immediate results (Bauman, 2005: 9, 56, 96, 107, 146, 152, 166, 194). These signs are thought to be typical of the modern Russian society and lead to both social and private life disintegration.

Conclusion

The conducted research has proved the formulated hypothesis. Two and a half decades of the post-Soviet period changed the political consciousness of the Russian citizens: today there is every reason to assert that the political sphere of life is no longer a priority in the values of most Russians. Causes do not only include general de-politicization in the society, but also the modified role of 'the media influence.' Their interest in politics has a cyclical character. Nevertheless, its decrease, compared to the early 1990s, cannot be regarded as an absolutely natural and objective process. It is fallacious to attribute the decline in the activity, as some authorities do, to satisfaction of the population with their life, as well as to the shift from politics to more substantial problems of healthcare, work, family, and leisure time. The mobilizing method of increasing activeness of the Russians, which has been applying for a few decades, becomes increasingly ineffective. Moreover, intensifying

political pessimism and gloomy worldview are becoming characteristic features of the Russian society. There is alarming statistics, published by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ISRAS) in December 2017, which says that nearly half of the Russians do not believe in their country's future and are confident that the presidential elections will change nothing. Only 26 per cent of the citizens (in spring, it was 31 per cent) believe that they will improve their wealth in the nearest future (Filina, 2017: 12).

The decline in interest in politics among a significant part of the Russians, and young people in particular, reflects a depressive nature of the modern society, hardly expressing social optimism, social energy, and inspiring views on both the collective and individual future. Its depressive nature is characterized by a spiritual inner vacuum caused by alterations in their life style, loss of moral compass, uncertainty, disappointment with current policy, tiredness of broken promises of the government, increasing social stratification, and apprehensive expectations of a growing confrontation with the West. The necessity to boost political and civic activity of the Russians under new challenges is linked to the problem of government control, rationalization of internal and external policies, and social unity of the government. A growth of voluntary movement of various types seems quite hopeful in this connection.

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