



— SPECIAL REPORT —

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TECHNOCRAT OR SILOVIK

SPECIAL RAPORT ON RUSSIAN GOVERNORS

- The large-scale personnel changes in the Russian Federation indicates that such a situation is not only due to the pre-election campaign as loyal and efficient people are needed in order to ensure the proper result of the vote. It constitutes an element of a new role of the regions in the Putin regime, which may be associated with the start of his new presidential term.
- The aforementioned personnel reshuffles result from the state's increasing centralisation, which seems to be additionally fuelled by growing importance of the so-called siloviki.
- The entire process has begun right after changes within the leadership of the Presidential Administration (also referred as PA). The key role is played by its head, Anton Vaino, as well as Sergey Kiriyeenko who has recently replaced Vyacheslav Volodin as first deputy chief of staff of the Presidential Administration.
- The fact of restoring direct gubernatorial election in 2012 has only seemingly strengthened their position. Indeed, it is getting weaker, if only because the president is given full freedom to dismiss governors and appoint acting ones, who confirm their mandate in a fully controlled election.
- Importantly, none of the changes, which occurred in 2017, could be justified from economic point of view. Such regions as Mordovia, Khakassia and Kabardino-Balkar struggle with the most difficult financial situation. Even though, governors of these regions managed to retain their positions. Interestingly, it is no longer enough to maintain political calm (with no protests being organized), demonstrate economic successes and to obediently fulfill Putin's decrees. In most cases, dismissed governors met all these criteria.
- As for new appointments, several common denominators can be observed:
 - most of the new governors do not come from the regions they are supposed to administer; one can observe that the heads of regions are increasingly separating themselves from local elites; instead, posts are assumed by officials from Moscow (also referred as „Varangians”, which denotes officials who have little or no biographical relation to the region they are tasked with governing);
 - it can be noticed that governors are politically neutral; they are less and less associated with any party (especially the ruling United Russia); most of them, due to their age and previous professional experience in federal institutions,

are referred to as „young technocrats”.

- among the heads of regions, there are more and more people who had previously served in the defence and law enforcement institutions;
- almost all newly appointed governors owe their current career to Putin

- The recent series of resignations, detentions, trials as well as severe convictions of former governors is used for the campaign’s purposes; Putin seeks to prove that he is fighting corruption even at such a high level. It is easier to introduce new personnel than reforms whereas the recency effect aims to improve Putin’s political ratings. In addition, its purpose is to prepare the state for Putin’s next term and perhaps to serve as a testing ground for a group of potential successors of the current presidents.

In 2017, the number of personnel reshuffles (nearly twenty) has been the highest in last five years. Such changes have occurred in two large waves. In spring 2017, the heads of seven regions—Perm krai, Novgorod and Ryazan oblasts, as well as the republics of Mari El, Udmurtia, Buryatia and Karelia—lost their posts. In autumn, the governors of 11 other regions—Omsk, Samara, Nizhny Novgorod, Ivanovo, Oryol, Novosibirsk and Pskov oblasts, Krasnoyarsk and Primorye kraises, the republic of Dagestan and the Nenets autonomous district—all stepped down and were replaced by the Kremlin. It is noteworthy that the changes were introduced despite the Kremlin’s very good result in the elections for governor on September 10, 2017 that had been held by sixteen regions. Seven of them (Perm Krai, Novgorod Oblast, Ryazan Oblast, Buryatia, Mari El, Republic of Karelia and Udmurtia) were won by the acting governors nominated by Putin himself. As for other oblasts, their current governors, supported by the Kremlin, managed to retain their positions.

I.

The personnel reshuffles are of a two-sided nature as it can be considered in short- and long-term. The former may be motivated by the presidential election in March as well as it aims to improve the image of the politicians. It is neither about improving the control over

a given region nor solving local problems. Instead, authorities aim to increase people’s trust towards them by replacing an „old” governor with someone new. Obviously, the recency effect cannot last for a long time but it will be satisfactory till Russia’s March election. The second aspect, related to the change of the region’s management model, seems to be way more important.

The governor is supposed to be a bureaucrat and not a politician. The most important criterion is to implement instructions from the Kremlin. A new chief of local administration is a man with some clerical experience acquired in federal institutions. In addition, he would be a manager supposed to supervise the region in accordance with guidelines from the Kremlin; a man without any serious political ambitions, who could cooperate with local elites and companies and count on favourable result in elections, to strengthen himself on the country’s political arena. That is why new governors are usually young (they are in their thirties and forties) technocrats, have considerable experience in federal management and do not have any special relationship with the regions they are going to govern (such as Novgorod, Nizhny Novgorod, Kaliningrad, Udmurtia, Buryatia and Nenets Autonomous Okrug). Of course, there are some exceptions to this rule, for example in Karelia, the Kremlin



ALEKSEI DUMIN, GOVERNOR OF TULA PROVINCE, GREETES VLADIMIR PUTIN DURING HIS VISIT TO THE REGION
SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

nominated 52-year-old Arthur Parfenchikov or in Dagestan, it was 68-year-old Vladimir Vasiliev; nevertheless, both belong to the group of siloviki. Parfenchikov is former

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head of the Federal Court Bailiff Service and Vasiliyev used to hold the position of Moscow police general.

Moreover, it was clear that the main tendency of the entire process was to make personnel politically neutral. A half of the new governors appointed in 2017 do not belong to any political party. This can be explained by the deficiency of the ruling United Russia party as

well as the general trust crisis in all political parties (since the State Duma serves only as a rubber stamp). Besides, the party's political independence is becoming one of the factors that seem to characterize the new phase of Putin's rule, especially given the fact that he is running as an independent candidate. Moreover, the „new type” governor should not be linked with any local arrangements. A majority of new chiefs of local administration do not come from the regions they are supposed to control. Such an approach may be exemplified by the change of the governor in Nizhny Novgorod. Valery Shantsev, a 70-year-old political veteran who had been the governor of the oblast since 2005, was replaced by 40-year-old Gleb Nikitin, a former First Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation. He is a Muscovite. Alikhanov had lived in this Baltic-coast region for only one year until being named governor. In turn, the entire professional and political career of Andrei Travnikov had always been associated with the Northwest Federal District. However, the Kremlin appointed him governor of

Novosibirsk region.

II.

New heads of regions, relatively young technocrats from Moscow, without any considerable political experience as well as personal and business connections back in the 1990s, are first and foremost expected to obediently implement any recommendations from the Kremlin. Its personnel policy in the regions confirms that the key role in the presidential campaign is played not by the governors but by the president's representatives in the federal districts. It may be expected that they will be given increased powers. It constitutes yet another proof that the Kremlin's desire is to decentralise power in Russia. In fact, the result of such a policy, which has been run for many years, is the decline in the importance of political leaders and administrations of the oblasts.

It should be remembered that Putin „inherited” from Boris Yeltsin a number of very strong regions governed by their long-time leaders. It is noteworthy that the same oblasts (such as for example Tatarstan) had some pro-independence aspirations. Other regions were ruled by representatives of large corporations (Siberia and Far North) or local clan cliques (such as in North Caucasus). From the very beginning, Putin's priority was to annihilate the regions' aspirations to gain the greatest possible autonomy. The Beslan massacre in 2004 served as an excuse to abolish direct regional head elections. Since 2005, they have been appointed by local parliaments at the president's request. In 2012, the authorities returned to the previous solution so it would seem that Putin had agreed to make a step back and decentralise the state in order to give the Federation a more federal look.

But it only seemed so. It does not matter that the governor (or president) is elected by the inhabitants of a given region since Russia's president has the right to dismiss governors as well as to appoint acting ones (according

to the special law, the president has powerful competencies in this respect). Of course, any acting governor is then supposed to win the election. Compared to the previous wave of personnel reshuffles (the largest one, which concerned 30 entities, was held in the first phase of Medvedev's term), this time, the Kremlin clearly does not care about

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the result of the vote. It is even not needed to use any specific „electoral technologies”. The candidate filtering system is sufficiently tight whereas voter turnout is low enough. It has been determined that authority candidates would win almost everywhere. The main tool for eliminating real potential competitors is the so-called municipal filter, introduced a few years ago, with the restoration of direct gubernatorial elections. How does this procedure look like? It is requested to collect an appropriate number of signatures supporting members of the region's municipal councils (5 - 10 percent) under the nomination of a politician who want to apply for the post of governor. Importantly, a deputy can only support one candidate. It basically means that opposition politicians may be excluded from the election. The election in September 2017 confirmed the

effectiveness of the current system: authority candidates received from 60 to 89% of the votes.

So why does the Kremlin gradually lower the political significance and the images of the governors? At first glance, such a state of affairs seems to contradict the electoral goal. But in this case, one should rather mention long-term motivation. However, the economic crisis has become only a catalyst for tensions between Moscow and regions affected by budget cuts. Moreover, linguistic discrepancies can be distinguished, especially in the case of so-called „ethnic republics”. On one hand, it can be noticed that the Kremlin seeks to restrict the powers of the regions, but, on the other hand, the latter tend to resist and demand for respecting constitutional arrangements. An obedient governor is supposed to facilitate the Kremlin’s pacification of dangerous tendencies but at the same time he would not risk becoming the head of a potential „irredentism”.

III.

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since corruption is ubiquitous and only Putin and Lubyanka can decide who will be punished. Although the process of disciplining governors began in 2015, it grew stronger in the years 2016-2017. Last year, two regional leaders and eight deputies were arrested after being found guilty of bribery. At the beginning of this year, courts issued guilty verdicts in the criminal cases of other officials.

On February 1, a court in Moscow sentenced former Kirov Governor Nikita Belykh to eight years in a penal colony. In summer 2016, Belykh was detained in a restaurant in Moscow where, according to investigators, he had been allegedly caught red-handed taking 150,000 euros in cash from a German businessman. On February 9, a court in the Russian Far East region of Sakhalin has sentenced former Governor Aleksandr Khoroshavin to 13 years in a penal colony for accepting a huge bribe. Thus it constitutes the highest sentence that has been issued in Russia in the last two decades for an official who headed the country’s regions. Detained in March 2015, Khoroshavin was the first Russian governor to be arrested during his period of office and dismissed only later. At the end of December 2017, a court opened a criminal case against the Komi Republic Governor Vyacheslav Gayzer who had also been accused of bribery. There are some other officials waiting for their trials in custody suites: former governor of Mari El Republic Leonid Markelov (arrested in April 2017), former leader of Udmurtia (detained in April 2017, he has been placed on home detention due to health problems) as well as several former deputy governors. Characteristically, all the detainees were governors, both those who admit their guilt and those who convince of their innocence, still show their loyalty to the authorities. There are no political statements; surprisingly, there are even statements of support, either for the Kremlin or for the ruling party. For example, Belykh does not want to submit his complaint against the Russian state to the European Court of Human Rights even though, according to



FORMER KIROV GOVERNOR NIKITA BELYKH DISTRICT COURT IN MOSCOW
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lawyers, he would have a great chance of winning the case.

Such purges may, however, have a negative impact on the state apparatus at the regional level; even if officials feel scared at first, then the local elites realise that no one could defend them and their interests. The situation seems to be demoralizing for these levels of Putinocracy, especially if officials can see that their colleagues are kept in prison because they corruptly collected money for Putin's party and his presidential campaign. So nobody will want to risk and put his or her rear on the line. One may expect stagnation and very limited decision-making and such a situation may concern everyone: both governors and lower-level local officials.

Leonid Markelov had governed the Republic of El Mari for 16 years. He stepped down from the post of governor on April 6, 2017. Officially, he submitted his resignation at his

own request and the Kremlin was expected to find a new position for him. However, on April 13, Markelov was detained and transported to Moscow. On April 14, a court in Moscow issued a temporary detainment order for former governor of Russia's Mari El Republic accused of accepting bribes. The situation came as a shock for the elites because Putin, during his meeting with the new Mari El Governor Aleksandr Yevstigneyev, publicly stated that Markelov should be used „somewhere else”. He is even said to become a senator. So far, Putin's word has been regarded as an ultimate one and no one dared to act against his will. Khoroshavin, Gayzer, Belykh and Solovev, who have been arrested in the last few years, were not given any guarantees by the president shortly before their detentions. Many governors were imprisoned after being dismissed by the president, which had been caused by the „loss of trust”. Markelov's case is completely different. His case will make feel political elites

even more nervous. There can be two possible explanations; none of them are optimistic for officials, politicians and businessmen. The first version: Putin's word does not mean as much as it used to be; the president can promise something and then withdraw from it. The second version: siloviki (in cooperation or in conflict with someone in the Kremlin) play their own game whose rules are not revealed to the presidents. Both in the first and in the second case, the basic principle of the current governmental system in Russia seems to be undermined (vertikal vlasti, „vertical of power”). So what is the moral for the governors (and other members of the administration)? Regardless of whether you give way to the Kremlin or not, you can be imprisoned anyway.

IV.

Apart from other motives, harsh sentences for former governors are expected to constitute the warning to the entire governors and a signal that it is controlled by siloviki. It has been the biggest wave of detentions of high-ranking regional politicians and officials for a long time. There are already dozens detained governors, their deputies, regional ministers with their deputies and mayors. One of the reasons behind such purges is the desire to weaken local centres of political power. Secondly, authorities seek to fight against corruption, which has been included in the opposition's political program. Finally, the last factor, which influences the whole country and its various domains, is an awakening to an acute political course and siloviki's rules. The current wave of repression against the heads of the regions is largely related to the growing importance of siloviki supported first and foremost by the FSB. Corruption cases regarding high-level politicians are one of the most effective control measures. The intensification of this activity carried out by the defence and law enforcement institutions is related to the general tightening of the domestic policy course during Putin's current term. There is a clear connection between the number of such cases initiated by the FSB

and the political situation in the country. At the end of Medvedev's term (2011-2012), there were fewer investigations of that kind; nevertheless, since 2013, one can notice an increase in their number. And the years 2015-2016 could be considered as the apogee; in 2015, one and a half times more offences were revealed than in 2013 and 2014. Only in the first half of 2016, this number was almost equal to all cases in 2013 and 2014. Intensified activity of the siloviki, who control the heads of regions, is also connected with the restoration of direct gubernatorial elections in 2012. The FSB has now greater powers over regional administration than the KGB during the Soviet era. Then the Security Service could not work out the leaders of the regions without the party's consent. Interestingly enough, Moscow exports its siloviki to the North Caucasus, which is quite a new idea. If former Moscow police general Vasiliev manages to deal with local elites and Islamic rebels in Dagestan, there may be more such

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appointments in the future. So far, it is obvious that Moscow strongly supports Vasiliev in his pursuits for introducing purges in the republic.

However, the most candidates for the regions are proposed neither by the Interior Ministry nor the FSB; in most cases, they are suggested by the Federal Guard Service (FSO). Among the new regional leaders, there may be Putin's

future successor. Such a candidate could preferably be young, loyal and accepted by siloviki; a person who owns his career to Putin from the very beginning. Having gained some experience at federal level, he could show his professionalism also in the region. The list of potential candidates contains names of former officers of the Federal Protective

Service, the Governor of the Yaroslavl Region Dmitry Mironov and the Governor of Tula Oblast Aleksei Dumin. Characteristically, the governors of Tula and Yaroslavl enjoy the support of Moscow (as evidenced by Putin's numerous visits and support provided to a state industrial corporation Rostec headed by Chemezov).

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