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## **‘to make a people out of a mere population’: Sovereignty and Governmentality in Hegemonic Russian Cultural Policy**

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### **Abstract**

The paper claims that contemporary Russian cultural policy has been determined by political transformations associated with the political project to establish sovereignty that has organised Putin's regime since 2012. The idea behind it is traced to Putin's 2006 intention 'to make a people out of a mere population'. To understand that intention, and to explain the contribution of culture and cultural policy to its concretisation, the paper draws on Foucault's account of sovereignty and governmentality, and the development of the Gramscian notion of hegemony. The paper argues that Putin's regime uses governmentality in its hegemonic project to establish sovereignty. To describe that project, and the contribution of culture and cultural policy to it, the paper presents evidence of the relation between Putin's political actions and changes in the structure of Russian state and government, Russian culture, and the cultural policy infrastructure. The paper begins with a discussion of the draft Concept of culture introduced in 2018 and concludes with an examination of its fate in order to raise the question of the contingency of Putin's hegemonic project.

**Keywords:** Russia; state cultural policy; draft concept on culture; conservative hegemony; sovereignty; governmentality

## Introduction

In March 2018, the Russian Presidential Administration issued a draft Concept of a new Federal Law of Culture (Concept). The action was pivotal insofar as it proposed to replace the emphasis on cultural diversity and autonomy established by the Russian Supreme Council<sup>1</sup> in 1992 with a notion of culture ‘as what shapes and transmits a special civilizational code of the nation’. Its purpose was to establish new legislation ‘on the understanding of this special mission of culture, which is not reduced to market mechanisms, nor to the sphere of consumption, nor to public services’<sup>2</sup>. The Concept affirms the agency and specificity of Russian culture against other notions of culture understood as threatening it, in particular the commercial or entertainment sector, because these do not support its essential ‘spiritual’ mission. Consistent with that mission the draft proposes a legally enforceable distinction between spiritual and consumer culture to prevent what is seen as the cultural degradation of Russia caused by a free-market economy in which ‘the customer is always right’<sup>3</sup>.

The significance of the Concept is that it consolidated and condensed the Kremlin’s approach to culture that had developed since 2012 through which it became understood in terms of its potential to educate people, strengthen state sovereignty, and unite the nation<sup>4</sup>. As is well known, after the crisis of 2011-2012 the Putin regime increasingly adopted a reactionary approach to the cultural sphere as part of the subsequent authoritarian turn in Russia and increased state censorship<sup>5</sup>. The punishment received by members of Pussy Riot for their 2012 performance protests at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow is perhaps the most

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Law №3612–1 ‘Fundamentals of Russian Legislation on Culture’ (Russian Supreme Council: *Consultant*, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> “Kontseptsiya Proekta Federalnogo Zakona o Kulture № 217” [“Concept of Federal law on culture”], *Presidential Administration of the RF*, 29 March 2018, [https://culture.gov.ru/press/current/kontseptsiya\\_proekta\\_federalnogo\\_zakona\\_o\\_kulture/](https://culture.gov.ru/press/current/kontseptsiya_proekta_federalnogo_zakona_o_kulture/) (accessed 19 March 2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Tatiana Romashko, “Biopolitics and Hegemony in Contemporary Russian Cultural Policy,” *Russian Politics* 3(2018): 88-113; Sanna Tuoma & Kare Johan Major, ed. *Russia as Civilization Ideological Discourses in Politics, Media and Academia*. (N-Y: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> B. Beumers, A. Etkind, O. Gurova, and S. Tuoma, ed. *Cultural Forms of Protest in Russia*. (London, N-Y: Routledge, 2018); Vladimir Gel’man, “The politics of fear: How Russia’s rulers counter their rivals,” *Russian politics* 1, 1(2016): 27-45; Lena Jonson and Andrei Erofeev, eds., *Russia - Art Resistance and the Conservative-Authoritarian Zeitgeist*. (London: Routledge, 2019).

well-known example. In that respect the Concept strengthened the legal and political status of ‘a new cultural policy consensus more akin to a conservative welfare regime’<sup>6</sup>.

In this paper, I set out to show that the formation of Russian cultural policy is subordinate to Putin’s political project to establish Russian sovereignty and its corollary, the formation of the Russian people as its source and foundation. The basis of that claim is in a remark that Putin made in 2006 during a speech to honour the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Russian philologist, Soviet dissident Dmitry Likhachev. On this occasion president Putin took the opportunity to announce the intention ‘to make a people out of a mere population’ (*iz prostogo naselenia sdelat’ narod*)<sup>7</sup>. For Putin, the Russian people did not exist in its specificity, but instead as an anonymous population. The political problem this raises for Putin’s project is that a people cannot be created out of sovereign *fiat*, not least because sovereignty pre-supposes the existence of a people as the legitimate basis of its action. That is to say, because the only justification for political rule in Russia is democratic legitimacy, and the Russian people as *demos* is sovereign, then its existence cannot be the effect of a sovereign act.

To overcome this difficulty Putin’s project attempts to establish the means by which a population can be acted on in order to transform it into a people, which will be the basis for the democratic legitimacy of sovereignty. For example, in 2012 Putin declared an urgent need to consolidate the Russian people within the limits of the ‘state-civilisation’ based on ‘spiritual bonds’, traditional norms and orthodox morality in order to make ‘Russia a sovereign and powerful country in the XXI century’<sup>8</sup>. This task is reflected in opinion formation by supporters of Putin’s regime, for example, by a pro-Putin expert’s post outlining the project of Russian ‘cultural sovereignty’<sup>9</sup>.

The argument of the paper is that the formation of Russian cultural policy is an important element of that project, for two reasons. Firstly, it enables the formation of a specifically Russian culture as a means to act on its population in order to transform it into a people by supporting cultural aspects that can contribute to it and discouraging or eliminating those that do not. Therefore, within Putin’s project the representation of Russian culture is not

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<sup>6</sup> Lev Jakobson, Boris Rudnik and Stefan Toepler, “From liberal to conservative: shifting cultural policy regimes in post-Soviet Russia,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 24, 3(2018): 297-314.

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Opening speech at a meeting with the creative intelligentsia dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dmitry Likhachev,” Kremlin, 26 November 2006, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23930> (accessed 3 November 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” *Kremlin*, 12 December 2012, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118/work> (accessed 10 December 2019): 12-15.

<sup>9</sup> Sergey Chernyakhovsky, “About the Cultural Sovereignty,” *Izborsk Club*, 7 June 2014, <https://izborsk-club.ru/3354> (accessed 10 July 2022).

the reflection of a pre-existing culture but the effect of selective actions. Secondly, cultural policy is formed within the legal and institutional structures of the Russian political system through actions that are understood as legitimate within it in order to change it. The point of that is to establish presidential sovereignty over the political system. As the president is part of the political system, then it is not changed from the outside, but neither can change be categorised as endogenous. Through this process it becomes possible to gain support from participants in the political system, and from those areas of culture that are dependent on it. On that basis cultural policy acquires the capacity to act on a population in line with Putin's project. In short, cultural policy acts on culture in order to transform the population into a people as the basis for the consensual support and legitimacy of sovereignty, both at the level of everyday life, and at the level of state and government cultural organisations and institutions. The Concept is an example of the visibility of the logic of that project.

To explain and justify that argument the paper is structured in the following sections. In the first, I elaborate a theoretical framework with which to support and make sense of the argument. To do this, I consider Foucault's distinction between sovereignty and governmentality, and their corresponding subjects, people and population. Sovereignty designates, quite straightforwardly, power over a people. Governmentality, perhaps less straightforwardly, designates the management of the power of a population to increase itself in accordance with its nature, for example with respect to wealth and health. I use Foucault's conceptual framework because it is useful for understanding the issue of sovereignty and culture in Putin's project by introducing the notion of governmentality to explain the process of acting on a population. However, I argue that there is a political deficit in Foucault's account which is that it is focussed very much at the level of the logic of ideas, according to which its concepts designate forms of rule that are adopted in so far as they appear to work as solutions to problems. As a result, Foucault's pragmatic approach gives the impression that rule and its forms happen automatically, which tends to neglect the contested and contingent dimension of politics. As a result, Foucault's work tends to marginalise or eliminate the issue of sovereignty. That weakness is addressed through a discussion of the contemporary political resurgence of sovereignty and its links with populism.

To overcome limitations in Foucault's approach, I consider Gramsci's notion of hegemony, the idea that rule, whatever form it takes, is established and maintained on the basis of leadership which pre-supposes opposition, which in turn requires a relationship of coercion and consent. Furthermore, for Gramsci, the key terrain on which contests to establish hegemony are played is culture as the location of contradictory and inconsistent 'common sense' from which 'intellectual and moral leadership' is formed. Not only does that help to explain the importance of culture for Putin's hegemonic project, it also helps to understand that the relation between governmentality and sovereignty within it is one of articulation, to use the term introduced by Hall's and Laclau and Mouffe's development of Gramsci's theory. I argue that a key component of Putin's hegemonic project is to articulate governmentality as a means with which to act on a population in order to change it into a sovereign people, which will in turn establish the sovereign power of the regime. The project aims to change the nature of the Russian population. The governmentalisation of culture through the establishment of the

actions of cultural policy and an administrative infrastructure to support it is the vehicle for that project. In so far as it a hegemonic project it may succeed or fail.

In the subsequent sections I elaborate the empirical evidence to support the argument to show the articulation of sovereignty and governmentality through the development of Putin's hegemonic project. In the second section I summarise the context of Russian cultural common sense which Putin's hegemonic project articulates as a source of support, and as a means of categorising opponents. In the third section I show how the legal basis of sovereign cultural policy is established within the political system that is put in place following the anti-Putin protests of 2011-12. In the fourth section I describe the administrative infrastructure of governmentality through which the actions of cultural policy are distributed. Finally, in the concluding section, I consider the fate of culture in Putin's hegemonic project, and of the 2018 Concept in particular, to illustrate its contingency.

### **The Theoretical Framework of Governmentality, Sovereignty and Hegemony**

Foucault refers to the notion of governmentality in several of his published works, but it is not until the posthumous publication in the 2000s of 3 lecture courses that he gave in the 1970s that something like a systematic account of it became available<sup>10</sup>. For Foucault governmentality has the sense of the management of conduct, or 'the conduct of conduct' to use his phrase, and it emerges as a problem of rule and its solution in 18<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe, initially in France, through the economic writings of the Physiocrats on behalf of the trading freedoms required by an emerging merchant class in response to the restrictions of Absolutist rule concentrated in a sovereign. In essence, the Physiocrat's claim is that since nature is the source of wealth then allowing men to act in accordance with their nature will increase it. For the Physiocrats the task of the state and its laws is reduced to maintaining good economic order, largely through guaranteeing rules necessary for competition in markets, and the wealth and health of the population. Hence for Foucault the Physiocrat's phrase '*laissez faire, laissez aller*' is the emblematic slogan of governmentality. In that endeavour the state is assisted by the development of techniques of statistical and demographic representation of natural developments in various fields including wealth but also health and climate. Through such political technologies population becomes the subject of the state as an aggregate of variable actions and events. In that way a population becomes governable as an object on which the state intervenes to maintain economic order and optimises its capacity to do so, for example by improving its health. In effect, the population becomes the subject of the state, which is eventually transformed from Absolutist to something recognisably modern and liberal.

One of the reasons why Foucault's posthumously published lectures have been received with intellectual interest is because in them he develops a notion of neoliberalism as the

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Michel Senellart ed., Graham Burchell transl. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

culmination of governmentality<sup>11</sup>. By neoliberalism Foucault refers to the ideological and practical forms of rule that became dominant in Western Europe and North America during the period in which the lecture courses were delivered as a response to multiple social and economic instabilities. In Foucault's account, neoliberalism as a form of rule can be traced to a group of European and North American economic theorists who began work in the 1920s and 1930s around the problem of defending capitalism from both Fascism and Socialism as well as its own alienating effects. Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman are perhaps the most well-known representatives<sup>12</sup>. Becker's notion of 'human capital'<sup>13</sup> was Foucault's most recent example. One of the distinctive features of neoliberalism is that it abandons the core Physiocratic notion that markets are the natural institution which enabled men to naturally produce wealth if left to their own devices, an assumption that had been shared by most subsequent economic theory, with the exception of Marx, long after the other elements of their thought had been refuted and forgotten, such as its basis in the idea that only nature can produce value and labour adds nothing to it.

Instead, the neoliberals argued that there was nothing natural about markets or any of the institutions of capital, including the tendency to use freedom to increase wealth. Therefore, the institutions and a positive subjective relation to the production of wealth had to be created. For neoliberals, it was the role of the state to do that. Thus, neoliberalism goes further than the Physiocratic restriction of governmentality to managing economic order by expanding its role to the creation of economic conditions, and to encourage the appropriate subjective relations to support them by expanding those conditions to all social dimensions such that individuals are encouraged to increase their 'human capital' and subject their freedom according to cost-benefit criteria. The task of neoliberal governmentality is to optimise the potential of the population.

It is important to stress that for Foucault neoliberalism is primarily a political rather than economic concept. Or rather, it is not economic in the modern sense of an autonomous object with its own observable laws and characteristics. Just because neoliberalism arises from economic theory it does not follow that it describes and explains actual economies, and certainly not those of Western capitalism during the period of neoliberal dominance. From the Physiocrats to the neoliberals, the state is required to support the economic freedoms instituted in markets, and at the same time to be absent from markets. The state must not 'govern too

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Bio-Politics'— Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality", *Economy and Society* 30, 2(2001): 190-207.

<sup>1212</sup> Stephen Metcalf, Neoliberalism: the idea that swallowed the world, *The Guardian*, 18 August, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world> (accessed 10 June 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Gary Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

much'. However, a weakness in Foucault's account is that it does not really discuss the issue of the authority of the state, its capacity to support any form of rule, and thus of governmentality itself. This oversight arises from Foucault's positivist methodology. Rose and Miller<sup>14</sup> call it 'analytics of government' which seeks to identify a 'problematics of government'. This notion refers to the links established historically between problems and questions of rule, and the answers and solutions that emerge to maintain it, and which appear as 'political rationalities', 'moral justifications' and 'governmental technologies'. On the one hand, the strength of this approach arises from its discovery of governmentality as a form of rule. On the other hand, its weakness is that it does not account for the establishment of forms of rule. It does not account for the political dimension in the sense that it proceeds as if explanation is a matter of problems and solutions. The problematic becomes the agent of history, and history is the history of what works. Hence retrospectively everything looks necessary, as if power was not involved in its own establishment.

In other words, for Foucault governmentality becomes political rationality as such, or the logic of the political. Consequently, Foucault tends to suppose that sovereignty, as a form of rule, has been erased by governmentality. In fact, the argument of his earlier *Discipline and Punish*<sup>15</sup> rests on the claim that the excessive spectacle of sovereign power over life is replaced with the precision of the measured disciplinary power to produce life in Western Europe from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a development that Foucault also refers to as 'biopolitics'. On the other hand, Foucault might not have been entirely consistent because in another text he claimed that 'sovereignty is far from being eliminated' and that 'the problem of sovereignty is made more acute than ever'<sup>16</sup>. In any event, the question of the authority to rule has been posed by the issue of the decline of neoliberalism and the rise of populism in the wake of the 2008-10 financial crisis. States were required to act with authority, but its basis was not clear, and their actions were considered detrimental to populations especially when they emerged from institutions of multi-state cooperation without substantial state-based authority compatible with democracy. One of populism's characteristics is that it poses the question of authority to rule and answers it in the form of the sovereign people. On this account sovereignty emerges as a solution to the problem of the weakening of neoliberal governmental rule which had been tied to the fortunes of financialization. In practice Populism amounts to the assertion of the executive over the legislative dimensions of the modern state. This is justified in democratic societies to the extent that the executive is sovereign, and sovereignty is located in The People co-extensive with a bordered geographical territory. Of course, populism requires a politics based around the

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<sup>14</sup> Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, "Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government", *The British Journal of Sociology* 43, 2(2010): 173.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan transl. (N-Y: Vintage Books, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, "Governmentality", in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller ed., *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991): 101.



distinction people/not-people (e.g. elites, immigrants etc.), which did not emerge from nowhere. The financial crisis provided the opportunity for its emergence as a solution to the problem. That does not mean that other solutions are not possible.

Recently Davies<sup>17</sup> has activated the political dimension by using Foucault's sovereignty-governmentality distinction, but not his methodology, to explain the decline of neoliberalism and the political rise of Populism, primarily in the form of Donald Trump. The key to Davies's argument is the claim that Foucault exaggerated the extent to which sovereignty and governmentality are conceptually, historically and practically distinct and opposed. That would help to explain the continued role of the sovereign state within governmentality, and the emergence of para-state institutions within neoliberalism, from the IMF to Amazon, which, according to Davies, exercise quasi-sovereign rule and are targets of democratic resentment. Consequently, Populism itself is not exterior to neoliberal governmentality and, according to Davies, it is characterised by the combination of neoliberal economic deregulation, or marketisation, with social and political illiberalism. Hence Populism is a form of rule in which 'sovereign power acts vicariously via governmental power'<sup>18</sup>. Governmentality is not eliminated but delegated by sovereignty, which reconstitutes its sphere of action and withdraws from the business of government. Population is subordinated to The People, and mobility is replaced by stability. Sovereignty is exercised through decisionistic exceptionalism, in the manner of Schmitt's normative realism, through which it maintains its distance from governmentality. For Davies this solution supported the interests of capital.

I agree with Davies's analysis of the relationship between governmentality and sovereignty and accept the validity of its contribution to explanations of the characteristics of populism. In many ways it resonates with Vasilache's<sup>19</sup> methodological proposal to regard the relationship between governmentality and sovereignty in terms of a linear conceptual model of a continuum, rather than an opposition, that is able to grasp the complex and adjustable configurations of sovereign and governmental politics in empirical research. Consequently, contemporary populism would be one possible configuration. However, what remains to be explained is how sovereignty-governmentality configurations are produced politically, for example in the case of populism, and stabilised.

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<sup>17</sup> William Davies, "The Revenge of Sovereignty on Government? The Release of Neoliberal Politics from Economics Post-2008", *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, 6 (November 2021): 95–118.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Andreas Vasilache, "Security in the sovereignty-governmentality continuum", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, 6 (2019): 681-711.

To answer that question, I use the Gramscian framework and its subsequent development in the works of Hall, and of Laclau and Mouffe<sup>20</sup>. From this perspective there is nothing natural or automatic about rule, which Gramsci realised when the Italian working class switched from Communism to Fascism. For Gramsci rule implies leadership, or hegemony, which is based on establishing relations of coercion and consent, exclusion and inclusion, in political will formation. The conditions and limits of this process are set by culture in the broadest sense, a contradictory and inconsistent terrain on which hegemonic projects act in order to form a ‘common sense’ of assumptions which become natural and taken for granted. Hall famously used that framework to explain the dominance of Thatcherism which combined populism and ‘free-market ideology’, which would subsequently be incorporated into the notion of neoliberalism, with strong-state authoritarianism by appealing to the common sense culture of sections of the English working class with regard to ideas of Britishness and race, amongst other things, in order to produce a representation of The People against an ‘other’ as the basis for the hegemony of ‘authoritarian populism’.

Laclau and Mouffe radicalised Gramsci’s framework, largely by removing its vulgar Marxist assumptions about the political consequences of the capitalist mode of production, in order to stress the contingency of hegemonic projects. In that way they affirm the priority of the political as the formation and destruction of hegemonic projects which seek to establish social ordering through an antagonistic relation with an ‘other’, and which do not occur on the basis of a logically necessary ground or foundation. From that perspective combinations of sovereignty and governmentality would be understood as hegemonic projects to establish relations of coercion and consent. To use the concept introduced by Hall and by Laclau and Mouffe, the relation between governmentality and sovereignty is one of ‘articulation’.

Applying such a perspective to contemporary Russia may raise some objections. Although many analysts accept that the category of populism can be applied to Putin’s regime, these stress its authoritarian dimension. Claims for its neoliberal component are more controversial. At best, there is an acceptance that the marketisation introduced by Western governments after the fall of the Soviet Union have persisted, although even here its neoliberal logic is compromised by Russian ‘gangster capitalism’. That may be true, but it restricts neoliberalism to its economic aspects at the expense of its governmental ones. I argue that in the case of Russia sovereignty and governmentality are articulated as logics of rule within

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<sup>20</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001).

Putin's hegemonic project. In that respect I agree with both Budraitskis's<sup>21</sup> and Bikbov at al<sup>22</sup> claim that Putin's project, and its formation of Russian cultural policy, combine seemingly incompatible elements of ideological traditionalism which support sovereignty with governmental neoliberalism. One consequence of that, for example, is that cultural works that do not support, or oppose, the values of cultural policy are deprived of state support and required to exist through the market, or worse. I add to their account an analysis of Putin's project as a hegemonic formation in which cultural policy plays a decisive role. Culture is formed as a tool for creating the Russian citizen as a 'unitary subject'<sup>23</sup> which combines the 'spiritual' of the people with 'the person' of the population. In doing so, governmentality is subordinated to sovereignty. Putin mobilises the residues of neoliberal governmentality in support of a hegemonic project to establish sovereignty. However, because it is a hegemonic project it does not follow that it will necessarily succeed.

### **Culture in Putin's Hegemonic Project**

The hegemonic character of Putin's project in which sovereignty and governmentality are articulated, and the justification for its categorisation in terms of populism, is indicated by the Kremlin's response to the emergence of popular street level demonstrations against the government in 2012, mainly in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Anti-Putin demonstrations demanding fair elections and liberal reforms, mainly in Moscow and St Petersburg, were described in state-media as dangerous manifestations of the 'colour revolution' and 'the fifth column', that is, 'troublemakers' informed by foreign influence and money<sup>24</sup>. Because media represented political grievances and discontent as originating externally through the influence of Western spies<sup>25</sup> which deviated from the normal social order, and because opposition movements were brutally suppressed by the police, it is often assumed that the Kremlin response simply imposed repressive authoritarianism. In fact, the reaction was more nuanced.

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<sup>21</sup> Ilya Budraitskis, "Contradictions in Russian Cultural Politics: Conservatism as an Instrument of Neoliberalism", *LeftEast*, 12 September 2017, <https://lefteast.org/russian-contradiction/> (accessed 10 March 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Bikbov, Lena Jonson and Andrei Erofeev, "Neo-traditionalist fits with neo-liberal shifts in Russian cultural policy", in L. Jonson and A. Erofeev, eds., *Russia - Art Resistance and the Conservative-Authoritarian Zeitgeist*. (London: Routledge, 2018): 65-83.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Hall, "Gramsci and Us", in Martin James ed., *Antonio Gramsci*. (Glasgow: Routledge, 2002): 217-238.

<sup>24</sup> Karrie Koesel and Valerie Bunce, "Putin, Popular Protests, and Political Trajectories in Russia: A Comparative Perspective", *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28, 4(2013): 403-423; Graeme Robertson, "Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011-12 in Broader Perspective", *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, 2 (2013): 11-23.

<sup>25</sup> The exclusion of the political agency of Russia's population with respect to its various interests, visions, and demands has constituted an essential part of the post-2012 hegemonic thinking and policymaking that remains valid up till now.

The Kremlin did not deny the empirical basis of oppositional demands. Instead, it took the opportunity to formulate a new political project organised around Russian sovereignty which it claimed would go some way to satisfy widespread grievances. For example, prior to his election Putin<sup>26</sup> announced a political project of establishing ‘the political system of Russia... which is capable of unconditionally guaranteeing the sovereignty of Russia and the prosperity of the citizens of our great power for decades to come’. Similarly, in *Izvestia*, Putin<sup>27</sup> identified ‘growing social and ethnic pressure’ as well as various ‘destructive forces [...] emanating from countries seeking to “export democracy” by force and military action’ as one of the key threats to Russia’s state sovereignty. Subsequently, to solve this problem, among other ‘pressing issues’, Putin<sup>28</sup> outlined several steps for national development aimed at reducing risks and allowing Russia to ‘adequately play the role dictated by its civilizational model, great history, geography and its cultural genome’. Following a series of campaign op-eds<sup>29</sup> in which (then) Prime Minister Vladimir Putin outlined the challenges and obstacles to Russia’s development which he promised to tackle as president, the eleven May Decrees were distributed within hours of his inauguration<sup>30</sup>. Their purpose was to empower the President to establish command over such things as the minimisation of fatalities, an increase of the birth rate, the growth of the public sector, and the general improvement of the nation-wide state policies in education, the armed forces, international relations, and social services.

Although, as Ross et al<sup>31</sup> have shown, the 2012 May Decrees may not have been that effective in practice, they marked a decisive new phase in restructuring and representing Russia’s system of governance. On the one hand sovereignty is established as the location of the people through constructing an antagonistic frontier with an ‘other’. On the other hand, popular demands are absorbed into a logic of governmentality in order to optimise the

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<sup>26</sup> Putin, “Presidential Address” (2012): 15.

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Russia Focuses - Challenges We Must Meet”, *Izvestia*, 16 January 2012, <https://iz.ru/news/511884> (accessed 10 June 2022).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Vladimir Putin, Russia: national question, *Govaya Gazeta*, 23 January 2012, [https://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1\\_national.html](https://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html); We need a new economy”, *Vedomosti*, 30 January 2012, [https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2012/01/30/o\\_nashih\\_ekonomicheskikh\\_zadachah](https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2012/01/30/o_nashih_ekonomicheskikh_zadachah); Democracy and the quality of the state, *Kommersant*, 6 February 2012, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1866753> etc.

<sup>30</sup> Presidential Decrees of Vladimir Putin on May 7, 2012, № 594-606, *Government of the RF*, <http://government.ru/orders/selection/406/> (accessed 3 November 2019).

<sup>31</sup> Ross, Cameron, Rostislav Turovsky and Marina Sukhova, "Subnational State Capacity in Russia: The Implementation of the 2012 Presidential “May Decrees””, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 24 November 2021.

capacities of the population and neutralise opposition, a process that Gramsci referred to as ‘transformism’. In other words, the biopolitical optimisation of the population was ordered by sovereign power in order to subordinate governmentality and, at the same time establish a distance from it. In effect popular oppositional demands were absorbed into a project to establish a new political system which had been conceived prior to the protests. In doing so, the more radical demands of the protestors were de-legitimated, neutralised and banished to the margins of political discourse. Hence, the Russian citizen is imagined as both subject of sovereignty, to which it consents as its legitimate source, and subject to governmentality, which it supports in order to optimise its contribution to the health and wealth of the Russian people. Of course, this formulation is logically circular. However, that does not prevent its implementation as a political project. For that reason, an important dimension of Putin’s project hinges on its ability to constitute the state as guarantor of the welfare of the nation, and to do that requires the formation of individual citizens in conformity with ideals of the ‘true patriot’, ‘qualitative man’ and ‘cultural individual’ to establish lines of inclusion against real or imagined threats which are excluded and externalised within the social field. Hence a distinction between authentically-or-patriotically and western-or-not-so-patriotically<sup>32</sup> Russian is formalised as an antagonistic frontier organised around culture which provides the form for the consolidation of the multinational population as the ‘Russian people’ based on a shared ‘civilizational code’ and the Russian language from which to construct an equivalence between the president, the sovereign and the people, i.e., each term implies the others.

The cultural ground of Putin’s hegemonic project had been established in the dominant ‘common sense’ of educational and academic discourse in the 2000s with the quasi-discipline of culturology<sup>33</sup>, a compulsory subject for the Russian school and university curriculum. As Laruelle<sup>34</sup> points out, culturology advocates ‘cultural essentialism’ supported with reference to critics of Europe-driven liberalism and individualism such as hawkish conservative writers like Nikolay Danilevsky, Oswald Spengler and Samuel Huntington, and proposes the concept of ‘Russian civilisationism’<sup>35</sup> in order to combat Western decadence. A more politically focussed cluster of ideas about the relationship between the Russian state and culture arose in the early 2000s as a reaction to the marketisation of the state supported cultural sector which, it was

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<sup>32</sup> On distinctions between patriotic and non-patriotic culture see Goode, J. Paul. "Patriotic Legitimation and Everyday Patriotism in Russia’s Constitutional Reform", *Russian Politics* 6, 1 (2021): 112-129.

<sup>33</sup> See top cited Russian authors in Culturology, *DissertationInfo*, <http://dissertation-info.ru/index.php/-100-/167/-100-.html> (accessed 19 March 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Marlène Laruelle, “The Discipline of Culturology: A New ‘Ready-made Thought’ for Russia?”, *Diogenes*, 204 (2004): 28.

<sup>35</sup> Resolution of the All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference, “Civilizational way of Russia: cultural and historical heritage and development strategy”, *Russian Journal of cultural research* 2, 32 (2008): 7.

claimed, degraded the cultural level of the population through a shift in people's preferences in favour of Western popular musical forms such as pop, rock and rap music over classical forms such as ballet and opera. These ideas aimed to push back at the 'experimental line' introduced into Russian cultural policy during the immediate post-Soviet period. That is to say, attempts to introduce concepts of cultural economy, industry and diversity into cultural policy. According to two of its critics, that period of cultural development is:

clearly and implicitly associated with neoliberal transformations, with the principles of postmodern culture, with the commercialization of all spheres of activity, including spiritual ones, with a peculiar understanding of freedom of creativity and a critical attitude to national culture. This line is manifested in various forms; it is broadcast through many channels of information, art and artistic and "pseudo-artistic" performances, which are often supported by state and regional funding. Supporters of this line defend the principles of freedom of experimentation, the right to a new author's interpretation of original masterpieces, which is not always a successful solution. As a result, there are not only contemporary and high quality works of art that appear in Russian cities, but also there are art products, design and landscape solutions that sometimes do not correspond to the historical sights of the cities and make them eclectic; theatres that stage controversial performances that destroy classical dramaturgy, contradict public morals and religious beliefs; films and literature that misinterpret the national history and typological qualities of the Russian peoples<sup>36</sup> (translated by the author).

Moreover, according to the complaint of Muzichuk<sup>37</sup>, through this process the Soviet system of cultural enlightenment had been turned into 'a service sector for leisure activities' under the impetus of the liberal Federal reforms of the mid-2000s. Shifting governmental priorities from educational ones to 'providing access to cultural goods and services', entailed the formation of 'a narrow-sectoral approach to culture, in which culture is understood as merely a system of cultural and leisure institutions. As a result, culture is not interpreted in terms of upbringing and enlightenment, but as entertainment in the time free from work'<sup>38</sup>. Such criticisms lead to proposals, often in the language of demand, to reform cultural policy in order to support the conservative approach to culture against its reduction to the entertainment economy or so-called 'service sector for leisure activities' that operate by the law of supply and demand. That is to say, to protect culture from the market.

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<sup>36</sup> Olga Astafieva and Galina Avanesova, Cultural Policy and National Culture: Prospects of the Modern Russian Strategic Vector. *Bulletin of Yaroslavlsky Pedagogical University* 5(2015): 195.

<sup>37</sup> Valentina Muzichuk, "Novye Orientiry Kulturnoy Politiki Rossii" ["New guidelines for Russia's cultural policy"], *Manager's guidebook: Cultural institutions* 11(November 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

It is this discourse of cultural discontent that Putin is able to absorb into his hegemonic project. In this way, the commercial and experimental dimensions of culture are equated and opposed to claims about the specifically Russian and civilizational aspects of culture, an opposition that is isomorphic with that between non-Russia and Russia. This presents two advantages for cultural policy. On the one hand, proposals for a reformed cultural policy clearly support ideas about culture that organises ideas about the sovereignty of the Russian people. On the other hand, cultural forms, institutions and organisations consistent with those ideas can be protected from marketisation and enabled to enjoy a degree of relative autonomy. Hence proponents of reform aim to exclude commercial culture from cultural policy because it leads to ‘moral and demographic crisis’, ‘cultural degradation’<sup>39</sup>, passive consumption and barbarism<sup>40</sup>. Other supporters stress its political advantages. For instance, Vostryakov and Turgaev<sup>41</sup> claim that the ‘emergence of a new value-oriented model of state cultural policy in modern Russia will undoubtedly increase the readiness of the state and society to respond to the numerous challenges of our time and ensure a breakthrough socio-economic development of the country’. These and similar ideas were reinforced by academics working in the humanities and social sciences<sup>42</sup>. On this basis, the Presidential Administration, the demands of Russian cultural policy, and the dominant ‘common sense’ of elite cultural and academic discourse enter into reciprocal and hierarchical relations of solidarity. This solidarity is concretised through transformations in the political system that aim to establish the sovereignty of the people condensed in the regime of the presidential apparatus. The impetus for these transformations arises from the development of the hegemonic logic of the May Decrees. The vehicle is the development of the state architecture in which sovereignty, embodied in the presidential administration, is able to ‘act vicariously’ on the institutions of governmentality and establish a legal infrastructure of cultural policy which can create a cultural sphere that supports a people against the anonymity of the market exchange of a population and the dislocation of cultural experimentation.

### **Establishing the Sovereignty of Russian State Cultural Policy**

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<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Aristarkhov, “Basics of ‘Basics’. On the meaning of the state cultural policy”, *Journal of Cultural Research* 2, 36(2019): 6-7.

<sup>40</sup> Alexandr Bardakov and Sergei Shushpanov, “The state and culture in the context of the program document ‘Fundamentals of State cultural policy’”, *Via in tempore. History. Political science* 19-36, 216(2015): 147-154.

<sup>41</sup> Lev Vostryakov and Alexandr Turgaev, “New model of State Cultural Policy of Russia”, *Bulletin of St. Petersburg State University* 3, 36(2018): 6.

<sup>42</sup> Oleg Karpukhin and Sergei Komissarov, “The State of Russian culture: expert assessments and opinion of the population”, *Humanities of the South of Russia* 7, 6(2018.), 26-40; Marina Kashina, “Review of the Textbook Fundamentals of the State Cultural Policy of the Russian Federation”, *Administrative Consulting* 6(2018): 168-171.

In 2013, to combat the failures of their implementation, the original May Decrees were changed into 218 presidential assignments given to the Russian Government which supported them by introducing National Strategic Planning between 2014-2016 to deliver their key pledges. This was reinforced by the adoption of the Federal Law № 172 on Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation<sup>43</sup>, that established its governmental rationale aimed at ‘targeting, forecasting, planning and programming of social and economic development’ to reach the targets set by the 2012 May Decrees. At the same time, the law reinforces the sovereignty of the Presidential Administration over the institutions of State government. For example, Laine<sup>44</sup> points out that by this Law the President’s annual address to the Federal Assembly obtained a legal status as the basic steering document for the NSP. Presidential power was consolidated through the reduction of the role of the State Duma in law making by relocating legislative power within the Presidential Executive Office, PEO (<http://en.kremlin.ru/structure/administration>). The Presidential Councils, Presidential Commissions, Presidential working groups and cabinet meetings were put in charge of formulating, coordinating and assessing all government policies in line with national priorities declared in Putin’s May Decrees. By concentrating decision-making processes within the presidential apparatus, Putin’s promises were translated into strategic documents and long-term implementation plans, cabinet procedures, bureaucratic regulations, executive guidelines and financial instruments that together constituted new ways of policy elaboration and enforcement in the Russian Federation.

Through this development the domestic problems which the Putin regime absorbed in the May Decrees in response to the grievances of protest and its geopolitical solutions on the basis of sovereignty are transformed into a strategic set of priority national problems. The official justification for the transfer of legislative authority from the State Duma to the Presidential Administration was that it would improve a full and direct dialogue between the people, ‘[t]he bearer of sovereignty and the only source of power in the Russian Federation’<sup>45</sup>, and the president. In effect, the President becomes ‘guarantor of the Constitution’ in the public sphere, and, as sovereign, the embodiment of the People, a move reinforced by the consent of elites for the idea that only the president and his ‘manual control’ and ‘political will’ can make things work in the government. In this way, the Presidential Administration and its Councils, including the Presidential Council for Culture and Arts, acquired the legislative status to modify Federal legislation, a right that was not authorised by the Russian constitution at that moment. As a consequence of the Presidential monopolisation of sovereign power the

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<sup>43</sup> Federal law №172-FZ ‘On strategic planning in the Russian Federation’, Russian Government, 20 June 2014, <https://legacts.ru/doc/FZ-o-strategicheskoy-planirovanii-v-Rossijskoj-Federacii/> (accessed 19 March 2020): article 3.1.

<sup>44</sup> Veera Laine, *Nationalism as an Argument in Contemporary Russia* (Dissertation: University of Helsinki, 2021): 521.

<sup>45</sup> Russian Constitution (Moscow: Garant-Service, 1993), <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm> (accessed 9 March 2020): article 3.1.



presidential apparatus asserted itself through political and legislative initiatives in cultural policy, overriding the authority of the Russian Parliament<sup>46</sup>, by requiring legislation on culture to meet the requirements of the official doctrine and the presidential vision on the issue<sup>47</sup>. It is in this context that cultural policy became ‘an integral part of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation’ with respect to ‘economic prosperity, state sovereignty and civilizational identity of the country’<sup>48</sup>. Unsurprisingly, this political logic was applauded by prevailing and frequently expressed opinions in mainstream academic and official discourses<sup>49</sup> where the transfer of authority from the State Duma to the Kremlin was presented as a positive enhancement of the presidential intervention into cultural policymaking

These developments converge with another set of ideologically focussed actions to establish Russian state cultural policy that were set in motion in November 2013 when Putin instructed his Administration, together with the Council for Culture and Arts, to proceed with an elaboration of the ‘draft project for the fundamentals of the state cultural policy’ (*osnovi gosudarstvennoy kul'turnoy politiki*) that should outline a new political rationale<sup>50</sup>. Following that, in December Putin signed a Decree to approve the ‘Basics of Russian State Cultural Policy’, (BRSCP) which established a new *problematic of government* in respect to ‘the aims and strategic objectives of state cultural policy’<sup>51</sup>. The BRSCP intends to establish the identity of the Russian people through a ‘social mission of culture’ that ‘transmits to new generations a set of moral, ethical and aesthetic values that constitute the core of national identity’<sup>52</sup>. By doing so, the state policy aims at strengthening ‘spiritual, cultural, and national self-determination of Russia, the unification of Russian society and the formation of a moral, independent-thinking, creative, and responsible personality’ through the mobilisation of ‘the

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<sup>46</sup> In this article, the Russian Parliament is used interchangeably as the State Duma, which is a lower chamber of the Federal Assembly and a people’s representative organ.

<sup>47</sup> Tatiana Romashko, “Production of Cultural Policy in Russia: Authority and Intellectual Leadership,” in I. Kiriya, P. Kompatsiaris, Y. Mylonas, ed., *The Industrialization of Creativity and Its Limits: Values, Politics and Lifestyles of Contemporary Cultural Economies*. (Cham: Springer, 2020): 113-130.

<sup>48</sup> “Decree №808 ‘on the Approval of the Foundations of State Cultural Policy’”, *Kremlin*, 24 December 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/39208> (accessed November 3 2019): 1.

<sup>49</sup> Tamara Gudima, “Project analysis ‘fundamentals of state cultural policy’”, *Strategical Priorities* 3, 3(2015): 40-51; Viacheslav Surkov, “Putin's Long State: on what is going on here”, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11 February 2019.

<sup>50</sup> “List of instructions following the meeting of the presidential Council for Culture and Arts”, *Kremlin*, 17 November 2013, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/19647> (accessed 3 November 2021): instr. 2699, it. 1.

<sup>51</sup> “Decree №808” (2014): 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

full potential of Russian culture’<sup>53</sup>. The objective of the BRSCP is to reinforce and extend Russian ‘spirituality’ incarnated in culture as a national and international strategic resource. In this way, spirituality is optimised in order to enable ‘the people’ to restore the great power of Russia.

The BRSCP justifies itself by reference to an exceptional, critical, and challenging situation in which action on the citizen-as-person is decisive:

[t]he Russian Federation faces the task of implementing the economic and social modernization of the country in a historically short period and entering the path of intensive development that ensures the readiness of the state and society to meet the challenges of the modern world. This is possible only if there is a systematic and consistent investment in the person, in the *qualitative renewal of a personality*<sup>54</sup> (translated by the author, emphasis added).

One of the key principles of the policy is that Russian culture has the status of a natural resource. ‘[C]ulture is the same heritage as our natural resources [...], a significant asset of socio-economic development that ensures a leading position of our country in the world’<sup>55</sup>. The civilizational nature of Russian culture is defined by its essential functions of enlightenment and enhancement of the multi-ethnic people of the country which has ‘preserved, accumulated and passed on to new generations the spiritual experience of the nation, ensured the unity of the multi-ethnic people of Russia’, fostered feelings of patriotism and national pride, and strengthened the country’s authority in the international arena<sup>56</sup>.

The BRSCP identifies threats to that project, which are simultaneously internal and external. Cultural phenomena attributed to free-market forces, such as popular culture and the creative and cultural economy must be ‘subjected to aims and objectives of the state cultural policy’ through ‘economic, technological and structural decisions taken at the state level’<sup>57</sup>. Russian cultural policy opposes the destructive nature of individualism and affirms the unifying role of the Russian people, its essential features limited to ‘the system of values inherent in Russian society’<sup>58</sup>. Russian culture and its ‘spiritual-moral values’ are articulated politically by an intensified antagonism to Western pop-culture and European liberal values<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

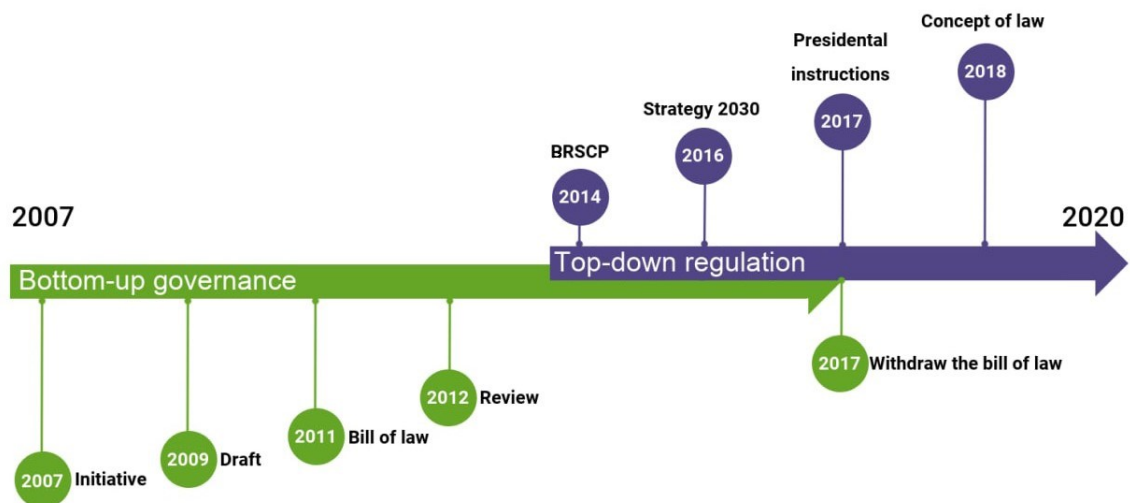
<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>59</sup> Irina Kotkina, “We Will ROC You! ‘Tannhäuser’ Opera Scandal and the Freedom of Artistic Expression in Putin’s Russia”, *Transcultural Studies*, 12 (2016): 66-91; Andrei Tsygankov, “Crafting the State-Civilization

The conditions for the implementation of the new state cultural policy were consolidated in 2014 when the Parliament, the Russian Government and the Ministry of Culture adjusted all legal regulations and programmes to the new BRSCP. The topics of Parliamentary debates changed radically. The bottom-up legislative initiatives to liberate the cultural sector and the cultural economy from the state's overregulation decreased in 2012-2014, spluttering to a halt in 2017<sup>60</sup>, elbowed out by the top-down agenda of protecting Russian culture and national identity from Western influence (see: Fig.1). Parliament was subordinated to the BRSCP project of establishing Russian sovereignty through the cultural improvement of the nation and fostering patriotic spirituality in the citizen-as-person.

**Figure 1. Shift in the Parliamentary debates from liberal initiative to change the legislation on culture to a conservative intervention of the Presidential Apparatuses**



Vladimir Putin's Turn to Distinct Values", *Problems of Post-Communism* 63, 3(2016), 146-158; Jardar Østbø, "Securitizing 'spiritual-moral values' in Russia", *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, 3(2017): 200-216.

<sup>60</sup> Romashko, "Production of Cultural Policy" (2020).

## Hegemonising the Governmental Infrastructure of Russian State Cultural Policy

In order to implement the new Principles of state cultural policy, the Kremlin's statements on culture were distributed as a set of administrative practices through the apparatus of National Strategic Planning. The 'Strategy of the state cultural policy for the period until 2030', Strategy 2030<sup>61</sup> and its supplementary Act – the National Project 'Culture' and its 'Passport for 2019-2024'<sup>62</sup> – outlined the characteristics of governmental technologies to execute the proposed political objectives. These strategic papers are directly informed by the BRSCP. Each emphasises that the civilisational mission of Russian culture is 'critical for the improvement of quality of life, for harmonisation of social relations, and for guaranteeing the preservation of the unified cultural space and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation'<sup>63</sup>. The Strategy 2030 is a core document – 'a practical guidance' – as Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinsky explained<sup>64</sup>. It reinforces the determination of the civilisational nature of Russian culture through an antagonism to 'mass culture, which fosters the consumer'<sup>65</sup> and apparently originates from Western capitalism. Unfolding this narrative, the document specifies 'the most dangerous symptoms of humanitarian crisis' that threaten 'Russia's future'<sup>66</sup>. These include:

- a decrease in the intellectual and cultural level of the society;
- a devaluation of the universally recognised values and misrepresentation of the value-based guidelines;
- the rise of aggression and intolerance, and asocial behaviour;
- the distortion of historical memory, a negative assessment of significant periods of Russian history and spreading disinformation about the historical backwardness of the Russian Federation;

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<sup>61</sup> "Order of the Government of the Russian Federation №326-r: 'On the approval of the State Cultural Policy Strategy until 2030', 29 February 2016", <https://www.prlib.ru/en/node/394465> (accessed 3 November 2019).

<sup>62</sup> "Decree №204 'On National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Russian Federation through to 2024'", Kremlin, 7 May 2018, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/43027> (accessed 19 March 2020).

<sup>63</sup> "Order №326-r" (2016): 2.

<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Culture of RF, *The draft project of the cultural policy strategy will be ready by May 15*", Ministerial Press-service, 06 October 2017, <https://culture.gov.ru/press/news/proekt-strategii-gosudarstvennoy-kulturnoy-politiki-budet-gotov-k-15-maya20171006172456/> (accessed 20 March 2020).

<sup>65</sup> "Order №326-r" (2016): 14.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6.

- the fragmentation of the society, the growth of individualism and disregard for the rights of others.

According to the Strategy 2030 these symptoms entail ‘the threats to the national security in the sphere of culture’, specifically the ‘erosion of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values and the weakening of the unity of the multi-ethnic people of the Russian Federation by means of the external cultural and information expansion’<sup>67</sup>. To eliminate these threats, Russian state cultural policy aims at<sup>68</sup>:

- 1) the formation of a harmoniously developed personality;
- 2) the strengthening of the unity of Russian society through cultural and humanitarian development;
- 3) the strengthening of civil identity;
- 4) the creation of conditions for the upbringing of citizens;
- 5) the preservation of historical and cultural heritage and its use for education;
- 6) the transmission from generation to generation of traditional values, norms, traditions and customs of Russian society;
- 7) the creation of conditions for each person to realize their creative potential;
- 8) the provision of citizens with access to knowledge, information and cultural values.

The plans outlined in these documents rely on the establishment of executive institutions of cultural policy such as the Ministry of Culture, Kremlin-affiliated foundations, central and regional authorities and the State Committee on Cultural Policy Affairs for their effectiveness. In this way, the governmental infrastructure of cultural policy is hegemonised and subordinated to the project of cultural sovereignty.

Accordingly, in 2015 the Ministry of Culture published an official handbook for cultural stakeholders, which explained how to interpret and adhere to the ‘Basics of state cultural policy’<sup>69</sup>. The handbook outlined the values of the Kremlin’s intellectual leadership, bringing together the scientific validation of the BSRCP, an account of Putin’s views on state cultural policy and an explanation of the conservative ministerial position authored by Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky<sup>70</sup>. At the same time, Medinsky emphasised ‘the strategic importance’ of culture for national security, the state and the country and an urgency to ‘elaborate the Strategy for cultural development in the Russian Federation’<sup>71</sup>. These commands have also given rise to an infrastructure of administrative guidelines for state-run institutions, and educational literature and research has been produced which emphasises ‘traditional values

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>69</sup> Ministry of Culture of the FR, *The Basics of State Cultural Policy of the Russian Federation* (Moscow, 2015).

<sup>70</sup> Romashko, “Biopolitics and Hegemony” (2018).

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Culture, “*The Basics*” (2015): 3, 47, 58, 20.

of the Russian civilisation', 'true patriotic feelings' and the 'conviction that Russian national interests, history and values must be protected'<sup>72</sup>. Through the adoption of the Strategy 2030, the Russian Government<sup>73</sup> ordered federal authorities, executive bodies and the Ministry of Culture to correct regional cultural policies, municipal programmes and plans of cultural development in compliance with the BSRCP. The State Committee was established as a president-chaired body for 'coordinating actions of the executive bodies and elaboration of the unified state cultural policy and its implementation'<sup>74</sup>. These institutions concentrate and focus the official doctrine in the strategic framework in order to produce, coordinate and implement cultural policy.

To establish a coalition of forces to rely on for support, new roles and duties were invented and subordinated to the Presidential Council for Culture and Arts and other bodies of the Presidential Administration. By these means the State aims to direct the Russian regions to renovate the 'cultural infrastructure and create a new, interesting and bright cultural product, which will attract more people to the institutions of culture'<sup>75</sup>. In this way, the 'social mission of culture' and its 'civilisational nature' has acquired force through a range of mandated programmes, plans of strategy realisation, publications and events. This establishes mechanisms through which consent is obtained from within the cultural policy sector. Importantly, it enables supporters of Russian state cultural policy to enjoy protection from market forces. The process through which this occurs is indicated by two supplementary strategic papers – the National Project 'Culture' and the 'Action plan' – which proposed ways, methods and instruments to implement Strategy 2030. The National Project 'Culture' (2019-2024) outlines the main directions of infrastructural, institutional and cyberspace support for the policy priorities through three federal projects: 'Cultural sphere', 'Creative people' and Digital culture'. The 'Action plan for the implementation of the state cultural policy Strategy for the period up to 2030 in 2019-2021'<sup>76</sup> is mainly concerned with establishing the ideological component of the state cultural policy and its support with the overall funding of about 113,5 billion roubles, which equals to an annual budget of the federal programme 'Development of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 275-276.

<sup>73</sup> "Order №326-r" (2016): 1, 16.

<sup>74</sup> "Resolution №817 'on Government Committee on state cultural policy'", *Russian Government*, 12 July 2017, <http://government.ru/docs/28408/> (accessed 14 February 2020): 1.

<sup>75</sup> "Decree №808" (2014): 38.

<sup>76</sup> "Decree №1259-p 'On the approval of the action Plan for implementation in 2019-2021 Strategies of the state cultural policy through to 2030'", *Russian Government*, 11 July 2019, <https://www.mkrf.ru/documents/rasporiazhenie-pravitelstva-rf-ot-11-iyunya-2019-g-n-1259-r-ob-utverzhdenii-plana-meropriyatiy-po-re/> (accessed 19 March 2020).

Culture’<sup>77</sup>. Its mechanisms include grants, events, projects, teaching programs and research to support the ‘preservation of the single cultural space’, to ‘strengthen Russian civil identity’, and ‘the social institute of the family which is the mechanism that provides the transfer of traditional Russian civilisational norms and values’<sup>78</sup>. These mechanisms expanded the fiscal and ideological monopolisation of arts, culture and media under the National Programs and Presidential Funds<sup>79</sup> against the trend of a ‘growing delegation of the provision of public services to the third sector’<sup>80</sup>.

Legal protection was obtained for the privileges of those who ‘contribute significantly to traditions of the values and norms of Russian civilization’<sup>81</sup>, which entails exemption from the disruptive forces of the market economy, and from other threats, which might undermine the cultural forms that the Law on Culture seeks to uphold. The Russian Ministry of Culture<sup>82</sup> supported academic research projects and official reports that demonstrate that the unity between the nation and culture is ‘key to strengthening State sovereignty’<sup>83</sup>. Powerful

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<sup>77</sup> “Budget Project for the period of 2020-2022”, *TASS*, 25 September 2019, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/6928986> (accessed 10 August 2020).

<sup>78</sup> “Decree №1259-p” (2019).

<sup>79</sup> Barbara von Ow-Freytag, “Filling the Void: Why the EU Must Step Up Support for Russian Civil Society. Policy Brief”, *Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies*, April 2018; Olga Dovbysh and Tatiana Belyuga, “Whose voices and what values? State grants for significant public content in the Russian media model”, in P. Savage, M. Medina, & G. F. Lowe ed., *Universalism in Public Service Media* (NORDICOM, 2020): 151-173.

<sup>80</sup> Marlene Laruelle and Laura Howells, Ideological or Pragmatic? A Data-Driven Analysis of the Russian Presidential Grant Fund. *Russian Politics* 5, 1(2020): 51.

<sup>81</sup> Aristarkhov, “Basics” (2019): 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Report on the main directions and results of the Ministry of culture of the Russian Federation in 2018 and objectives for 2019* (Moscow: Ministry of Culture, 2018): 5.

<sup>83</sup> See multiple attempts to revive theorisation of socio-cultural construction of the Russian nation, national identity, personality and individuality for the sake of the state sovereignty in such works as: Olga Astafieva and Andrey Flier, “Sociocultural modernisation: shaping a new cultural milieu”, *Russian Journal of Cultural Research*, 1 (2013): 1-13; Arkadii Marshak, “National identity as a condition of cultural and spiritual self-identification of the modern Russia”, *Vlast’* 4(2014): 50-53; Mikhail Kuznetsov, *National-cultural ideology and education of the personality of the new Russia: monograph*. (Rostov-on-Don: UN-T. 2015); Vladimir Zorin and Anatoly Rudakov. “The policy of identity as the factor of ensuring security in the conditions of globalization”, *Bulletin of the State Regional Moscow University* 3 (2018): 55-70.

advocates of the official doctrine such as former Deputy Culture ex-Minister Vladimir Medinsky, Director of Likhachev's Research Institute of Cultural and Natural Heritage Vladimir Aristarkhov, the former Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov and Presidential Adviser Vladimir Tolstoy contributed significantly to the sedimentation and naturalisation of conservative cultural priorities within the political and professional fields<sup>84</sup>. Most recently, the state patronage of culture was enshrined in amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation<sup>85</sup>.

### **Conclusion: The Contingency of Russian State Cultural Policy.**

According to Robinson<sup>86</sup>, the recent 'cultural turn' in Russian politics 'shifted the ground of what counted as success in state building from issues of functionality towards vague and indeterminate goals based on a cultural rather than an administrative conception of the state'<sup>87</sup>. For Robinson, functionality in the Russian context means maintaining the power of its 'neo-patrimonial' elites stabilised by Putin's charisma. According to Robinson the 'cultural turn' is unable to do that because it is ultimately about 'symbolic rather than administrative politics'<sup>88</sup>. The symbolic is not real politics, administration is. What this paper has shown is in fact that that is not the case. Rather, Putin's hegemonic project has established a governmental *administration of the symbolic* to support the establishment of its sovereignty. However, its hegemony raises the question of its contingency. This can be answered with reference to the fate of the concept. In December 2019, Vice-deputy of State Duma Cultural Committee Alexandr Sholokhov declared that the concept had been already 'accepted by all parties'<sup>89</sup>. Yet, by 2022, the document disappeared from the Ministry of Culture website without any official

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<sup>84</sup> Lena Jonson, "Russia: Culture, Cultural Policy, and the Swinging Pendulum of Politics", in Niklas Bernsand and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa ed., *Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia*. (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 13-36; Maria Engström, "Re-Imagining Antiquity: The Conservative Discourse of 'Russia as the True Europe' and the Kremlin's New Cultural Policy", in S. Turoma and K. Major, ed., *Russia as Civilization Ideological Discourses in Politics, Media and Academia*. (N-Y: Routledge, 2020): 142-163.

<sup>85</sup> Jakub Sadowski, "Amendments of 2020 to the Russian Constitution as an Update to Its Symbolic and Identity Programme", *Int J Semiot Law* 35 (2022): 723–736.

<sup>86</sup> Neil Robinson, "Russian Neo-patrimonialism and Putin's 'Cultural Turn'", *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, 2(2017): 348-366.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>89</sup> Alexandr Shpack, "The concept of the law on culture has been adopted – Sholokhov", *ReaNews*, 19 December 2012, <https://rueconomics.ru/421756-koncepciya-zakona-o-kulture-prinyata-sholokhov> (accessed 19 December 2019).



statement on it. In fact, what happened was that despite the full weight of the Presidential Administration behind it the Concept did not pass through the legislative approval process of the Duma. This was because the Concept, and Russian cultural policy, became contested within the political system itself.

An examination of a range of official<sup>90</sup> and expert<sup>91</sup> debates over the concept reveals a dispute between the cultural top officials and cultural elites. Vladimir Aristarkhov, ex-Deputy Minister of Culture, dismissed the Concept as too liberal in the sense that artists and cultural trade unions are promised too much freedom to make ideological and administrative decisions which could jeopardise ‘traditional values’. In other words, governmentality is subordinated to sovereignty. For their part, cultural elites, trade unions (museum and theatre workers) and experts involved in the legislative process argued in favour of greater autonomy, not only from the market but also from the requirement to provide a service. In other words, they sought a greater distance from the governmentalisation of culture precisely to preserve its unconditional sovereignty as the basis of the states. A similar fate befell the draft of the so-called Federal Law on ‘traditional values’, which had been put forward by Putin. Following harsh criticism from several art industry unions in February 2022, the Ministry of Culture has postponed public discussion of the ‘traditional values’ draft and announced that ‘more work needs to be done on it’<sup>92</sup>. It is also important to note that Mendinsky was replaced by Olga Lyubimova who expressed a preference for popular over elite culture<sup>93</sup>, which opens an opportunity for commercial culture to return to the frame, possibly because Russian people, including their president, continue to enjoy it. Therefore, a further set of research questions might arise around the re-articulation of Russian culture.

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<sup>90</sup> In 2019-2021, it was discussed at multiple venues such as the Russian Parliament, the Cultural Forum in St Petersburg, Public and Commercial Chambers, Youth cell of United Russia and the Russian Academy of Science.

<sup>91</sup> Materials of the round table The Federal Law "On Culture" In the System of Normative Legal Acts of The Russian Federation Moscow, February 9, 2021. Published as a special issue in the Journal of Cultural Research, 2021, 1(43), [http://cr-journal.ru/files/file/04\\_2021\\_20\\_46\\_34\\_1618767994.pdf](http://cr-journal.ru/files/file/04_2021_20_46_34_1618767994.pdf) (accessed 20 June 2022); Materials of the V Russian Cultural Congress with international participation "Cultural heritage - from the past to the future", Moscow, 8-9 November 2021, <https://cultcongress5.ru/> (accessed 20 June 2022).

<sup>92</sup> Minkult iz-za kritiki priostanovil obsuzdenie “tradizionnih cennostei”, BBC Russia, 14 February 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60372635> (accessed 20 June 2022).

<sup>93</sup> Sophia Kishkovsky, “Russia's controversial culture minister ousted in Putin's government reshuffle”, *The Art Newspaper*, 23 January 2020, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/russia-culture-minister> (accessed 30 May 2020).

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