

Innovation Policy in Contemporary Russia and the Struggle for Influence between the Leading Groups within the Establishment*

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Abstract. The article deals with the issue of choosing the innovative modernization strategy in the Russian Federation and with the suggestions made by the leading groups within the establishment concerning the growth incentives. We examine various scenarios of lobbying the industry and administration interests in the public innovation policy development process. We examine the strengths and weaknesses of the priority innovative development areas suggested by the industry representatives. We make a forecast for a mid-term related to the Russian innovation project transformation, given the “war of sanctions” and the import substitution policy implemented.

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается проблема выбора стратегической линии в ходе инновационной модернизации Российской Федерации и предложения основных элитных групп относительно «драйверов роста». Исследуются различные варианты лоббирования отраслевых и аппаратных интересов в государственной инновационной политике страны. Анализируются сильные и слабые стороны продвигаемых «отраслевиками» приоритетных направлений инновационного развития. Дается среднесрочный прогноз трансформации инновационного проекта России в условиях «войны санкций» и заявленной политики импортозамещения.

Key words: Innovation, modernization, establishment, lobbying, a new industrial policy, state, import substitution.

The Russian modernization project has been lacking a balance and a solid structure since the period of *perestroika*. Attempts were made in 1990–1992 to finalize the project and develop a strategy (cf. *500 Days* program developed by Grigory Yavlinsky, a program developed by Yegor Gaidar, the programs developed by the Civil Union and others.) However, they all have failed because of the poor skills of the reformers, or poor assessment of the political and socio-economic potential, or lack of consistency between the transformational theory and the reality. In addition, the strategy required that the liberal reforms undertaken should be consistent with the local political culture that differed significantly from the culture observed even in the Eastern European countries and the Baltic states, let alone the developed countries of the West,

and the underlining Russian ontological theory was not just inconsistent with, but sometimes was in contradiction with those theories. As a result, while facing a political defeat, the ‘young reformers’ opted for making a number of compromises. The first step was to make the pragmatic ministers (V.Chernomyrdin, G.Khizha, V.Shumeiko) occupy the key positions in the government of the Russian Federation in May 1992. This was followed by the appointment of Chernomyrdin as chairman of the government and making many ideology-blind professional managers members of the cabinet. The same trends were even more pronounced at the regional level, where the ‘democrats’ were forced to cooperate with the old bureaucracy. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that people fairly quickly grew disappointed with the

* Современная инновационная политика России в контексте борьбы за влияние ведущих элитных групп. Статья подготовлена при финансовой поддержке Российского гуманитарного научного фонда, проекты № 15-02-00080а и № 15-03-00737а.

liberal reforms that were largely rejected by the Russian society due to its political attitudes. The well-known October revolt in Moscow and the outcome of the Duma elections in 1993 and 1995 were the manifestation of the fact. Accordingly, persistence of Boris Yeltsin and his team in implementing the liberal reforms was fraught with political defeat. Thus, in fact, the 'pure' liberal modernization strategic program implemented in the early 1990-s failed. Judging by all appearances, the Russian reformers who were experiencing a cognitive dissonance because the theory contradicted the practice opted for totally abandoning the idea of developing a clear and concise action plan and focused on resolving the tactical issues.

It is noteworthy that the Russian government continued implementing such a policy after Vladimir Putin and his multicomponent team came to power. The team composition was mixed and included the *siloviki* the president worked with when he was a KGB officer in the times of the USSR, the liberal economists he worked with at the St. Petersburg City Hall, seasoned managers who traditionally acted in accordance with the orders made by the government, the young creative class representatives who were attracted by the career building opportunities, patriotic policy-makers who saw Putin as a new hand of iron, and many others. In order to maintain the balance, the government distributed the 'turfs' among the loyal members of political groups, communities and *nomenklatura*.

At the same time, V.Yu.Surkov proposed a 'unifying' national idea, the concept of a sovereign democracy, which was supposed to become an attractive concept for both the patriotic community (because of the 'power doctrine' content) and for the liberal community (because of the 'democratic' content), which was a matter of principle to the community members. Such a disposition was of controversial value as far as the national modernization course was concerned. The strength of the concept was in the fact that the multifaceted Putin's team could guarantee a civil consensus and a relative political stability needed to carry out the necessary political and economic reforms in the army, in the education sector, in youth upbringing and in spiritual life.

However, the 'dispersity' of the Russian establishment hampered a formalized strategy development; otherwise it would have impaired the loyal political and economic establishment groups' interests. However, as long as Russia was in a state of relative calm and the economic and political situation was favorable, a comprehensive top down modernization policy gave positive results. The establishment used their assets to get some interest and, in general, preferred not to be in conflict, but to cooperate. The inflow of petrodollars improved the living standards of a sig-

nificant part of the population, especially in big cities and metropolitan areas that were traditionally full of people who were in opposition to the government. The reform process was going on with the relative ease in different sectors, and the spontaneous patriotic attitudes were spreading among the people.

Then we observed the overlap of the 2008–2010 crisis, strained relations between Russia and the Western countries over the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 and the disturbance of balance in the political system as a result of the 'ruling tandem' emergence. All of the above put a number of issues on the agenda. Should Russia continue pursuing the modernization course? What should the modernization be like and what modernization format should be used? Who will be the key driver of the transformations? What are the reforms that Russia needs? Is it possible to carry out the reforms while maintaining the political stability and the status quo within the establishment? The concept of innovation, the concept of Russia as a strong, well-developed and modern state of the 21st century has been introduced into the Russian political discourse.

Vladimir Putin spoke for the first time about the Russian innovative development priorities in his Address to the Federal Assembly delivered on May 10, 2006. He mentioned the following goals:

- To ensure the inflow of investment into the production infrastructure and the innovative development sector. In particular, it was mentioned in the Address that there was a need to build such an environment in the country that could enable turning the production of new innovative knowledge 'into manufacture'¹.
- To promote applied research done at the research centers. The Russian president stated that only in this way the research sector modernization would not be formal, but rather would focus on producing products to be used by the national economy and introducing advanced research products to the market².
- To proactively involve the business community representatives in the innovative reforming process.

At the Security Council meeting devoted to the issues of fulfilling the objectives described in the Address of the President of 20 June 2006, V.V.Putin once again mentioned a need to set economic incentives for the businessmen to be come more engaged in the modernization process, thus ensuring that an environment is formed that would be favorable for generating new knowledge and technologies³.

¹ Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly, 10 May 2006.

² Ibid.

³ Opening Address by V. Putin at the Security Council meeting dedicated to the issues of fulfilling the objectives described in the Address of the President of 20 June 2006.

D.A. Medvedev, the successor to Vladimir Putin, supported the innovative development trend. He described the Four I (Innovation, Investment, Institutions, Infrastructure) concept⁴. Moreover, in his Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly made on 5 November 2008⁵ he made public a list of prioritized goals, which, *inter alia*, included the following:

- To build a personnel pool and attract the most talented, creative and professional staff to positions in government institutions at various levels;
- To revive the best national educational system traditions;
- To produce and export knowledge and advanced technology, to occupy the leading position in the sector of research and education;
- To restructure the public administration system in order to adjust it to the innovative development process;
- To develop an innovative development ideology and innovative development programs for the establishment and the people at large.

According to D.A. Medvedev, Russia should fulfill the objective of building a new economic system that would provide for interaction between its various parts⁶.

After Vladimir Putin regained power as president of the country, the innovative modernization machine gained new momentum. He set the objective for the country to occupy the leading position in the world during his election campaign in his major article titled 'We Need a New Economy'. According to him, in order to build an efficient mechanism for modernizing the country's economy, it is necessary to bridge the technological gap between this country and the leading countries of the world. The Russian president said that, as far as the international division of labor is concerned, Russia should position itself not only as a large-scale energy and raw materials supplier, but also as a player on the high-tech product market in a few sectors at least⁷. According to V. Putin, it is necessary for the Russian economy to use a solid legacy of fundamental research and the available Soviet pilot production centers in order to start generating innovations. Accordingly, he promised that the public research foundations supporting the researcher teams' initiatives aimed at developing research products would get 25 billion rubles by 2018. According to Vladimir Putin, we need to get rid of the inertia of major domestic capitalists who got unac-

customed to launching innovative projects, doing the research and making pre-production tests; while 47 state-owned companies have adopted their own innovative development programs, private companies should also get used to the thought that 3% to 5% of their gross income should be used for research and development purposes⁸.

However, as soon as the establishment and people at large call for the advanced development, the issue of ideology and reform strategy formation is raised. Despite the fact that the innovation-based modernization is a complex and multidimensional process, almost all of innovation-based modernization models have a strategy at the core of them. There has been no serious disagreement about the modernization plan in the Russian establishment recently. Everybody wants the Russian Federation to become a powerful, developed, modern state and a member of the global leaders' club. It is the strategy development itemized agenda that the establishment started major discussions about, and those discussions were in part caused by the fact that the champions of certain modernization models had particular preferences, and in part by the fact that they had their own selfish interests (industry representatives' interest lobbying, a desire to 'efficiently dispose of' the public funds allocated and so forth.)

In total, one can identify 6 basic theories regarding the innovative development agenda within the Russian establishment.

The first group is composed mainly of the systemic liberals (A. Chubais, A. Dvorkovich and others). It promotes the idea of an innovative breakthrough based on nanotechnology development. Such proposals stand to reason, as the nanotechnology sector is a new 'uncharted land' for all the global political and economic players, and the Russian nanotechnology sector's rapid development will give the country a chance to not only catch up with but also surpass its competitors on the international arena. Accordingly, achieving success in this sector would guarantee big political gains. Firstly, the government would get people's support comparable to the enthusiasm shown by the Soviet people after the flight of Yuri Gagarin into space; secondly, the position of Russia on the international market would become much better. However, the nanotechnology-based modernization project has largely remained a great theory, as no practical implementation stage followed. For example, Rusnano company, despite the enormous public funds allocated to it, failed to develop and 'churn out' a single breakthrough product. In May 2013, the state corporation was criticized harshly at the Accounts

⁴ Dmitry Medvedev's Krasnoyarsk Formula, *Nevskoye Vremya*, 2008, 16 February.

⁵ Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly of 5 November 2008.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ V.V. Putin, We Need a New Economy, *Vedomosti*, 2012, 30 January.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Chamber Board meeting. When performing due diligence, the Chamber officials found that the funds allocated to the company had been spent inappropriately and inefficiently. It turned out, for instance, that Rusnano had allocated 47 billion rubles to overseas foreign entities of various kinds while not giving reasons for doing this.

Skolkovo, a domestic version of the Silicon Valley, is another innovative project where priority is given to the nanotechnology development but here, too, the results produced so far are miniscule. In addition, following the audit of the Skolkovo Foundation conducted in the period of April 2013 – August 2013 by the Prosecutor General's Office, violations of law were detected that showed that some of the Skolkovo management's representatives were lacking integrity and were involved in corruption schemes. According to the *Novye Vedomosti* newspaper, about 50 billion rubles were allocated to the Foundation, and the Foundation was absolutely free to use the funds in any manner, as no specific targets were set. 22 billion rubles of the above amount were placed on deposit accounts and used for purchasing promissory notes, the interest on which was used for purposes other than scientific research, which was clear. Moreover, following the fueling tension in relations between Russia and the Western countries, the technology sector's influence upon the government institutions became much weaker as the sector tended to reach a compromise with the US and the EU. It is appropriate to mention here the detainment of two representatives of Anatoly Chubais' nanotechnology expert team by the law-enforcement agencies in July 2015. Leonid Melamed, the former head of Rosnanotech, who had been accused of financial abuse, was among the detained persons.

The champions of the second Russian innovative development model are the Russian government pragmatists who put forward the idea of IT technology development priority. Everybody knows that in today's 'network-based' society the information technology and computer science development are the areas where very promising and even breakthrough products could be created, especially in the Russian Federation, a country with a vast territory and a population that is poorly connected to the data exchange environment. Some steps have been taken recently to improve this. According to *TAdviser* portal, rapid growth was observed on the regional information distribution market in Russia in 2011–2012. A fairly good progress was made within the framework of the E-Government project. In 2011, Russia occupied the 27th place in the world UN E-Government ranking (E-Government Survey 2012: E-Government for the People). It is now closer to the top as it occupied the 59th place in the past

ranking. A major involvement of the urban population (not only youth, but also middle-aged citizens) in the data exchange environment was observed. The law 'On Information, Information Technologies and Data Protection' and other laws were adopted in 2006. However, the champions of this theory of innovative development priorities could not make the upper echelons of power recognize their theory in full. It is worth stressing that this 'core' modernization theory has been seriously compromised by the recent political events. In particular, the Arab Spring wave has shown that people's involvement in the data exchange environment is fraught with not only proactive 'conquest of space and time' but also leads to Twitter-aided revolutions that threaten the stability of the state. This is something the Russian government could not be in favor of. However, the senior management of the Ministry of Communications of Russia still thinks about making the IT sector and IT technology the core of the national innovative development project. Ironically, the economic sanctions imposed by the West against Russia in the summer of 2014 played into the hands of this modernization theory. In such unfavorable conditions the Russian government ordered that the imports be substituted in as many sectors as possible, including the IT and communication sector. In August 2014, Nikolai Nikiforov, Minister of Communications quickly acted in line with the order given at the top. He told the reporters that measures were taken in Russia that would allow import substitution in the software sector within the period of three to seven years. According to the Minister, they develop a comprehensive program to support software development in a whole big sector year after year while progressing step by step in order to substitute the imports, they develop a mechanism that will allow them to strengthen and support the industry, although it will not be a quick process, it will take three or five or seven years in some areas. However, he did not specify which products he referred to but said the country depended on imports of many types of software, including mobile operational systems, database management systems. He said that non-budgetary funds would be used for those purposes. N.Nikiforov said that the program should not be financed using taxpayers' money, there should be a mechanism developed in the industry that would help resolve this major issue.

The third innovative modernization theory is championed by part of the Russian establishment (i. e. the Russian Railways company management and senior officers of the Ministry of Transport). The theory envisages the transport arteries development. It is assumed that the strategic position of Russia between

Europe and Asia can become both a serious geopolitical and economic advantage. The theory champions are in favor of rapid construction and upgrade of strategic roads, railways, and air transit hubs. This means the project champions want Russia to become the 'moderator of space and time' on the Eurasian continent. In general, the transport and communications development was supported by the Kremlin officials and the general public.

It is noteworthy that not long ago, in June 2014, Dmitry Medvedev, chairman of the Russian government, signed a decree that approved a new version of the Transport Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period of up to 2030. It is aimed at developing a single Russian transport area that is based on a balanced advanced efficient transport infrastructure development, thus ensuring transportation services quality and public access to transportation services in accordance with social standards, ensuring access to and quality of transportation and logistics services in the freight transportation sector, integration into the world transportation services market, use of the country's potential in the transit services sector, and the transport system safety improvement. All of the above is stated in the explanatory note attached to the document. Amendments have been made to the timeframes and the stages within certain projects, including the high-speed railway development projects; an action plan has been updated for the Medium Term Transport Strategy Development Program (2014–2018). A draft of the decree was developed by the Ministry of Transport of Russia to implement the resolutions adopted at the government meeting on August 27, 2013.

However, there are some shortcomings in the above-mentioned project. Firstly, the political and economic situation is unfavorable that followed the Ukrainian crisis and the sanctions against Russia imposed by the US and the EU. Secondly, this large-scale project is a very costly one. It requires huge government investments, and the Russian government that has to deal with the sanctions tries not to become engaged in big risky spending schemes. Thirdly, the establishment and the general public are the champions of a controversial theory that says that the power of Russia is in the 'weakness' of its roads. They prove their paradoxical point by citing the fact that the German war machine 'slipped' on the Russian territory in the fall and winter of 1941.

The fourth innovation theory champions are the generals from the military industrial complex. They want the public to embrace that fact that the military industrial complex has traditionally been a generator of new ideas and technologies, and that this sector, unlike most other sectors that were seriously damaged in the 1990-s, maintains the industrial infra-

structure, keeps the personnel and has the funds that are used to finance the R&D sector.

In August 2014, Dmitry Rogozin, deputy chairman of the Russian government, published an article in the *Natsionalnaya Oborona* journal. He argued that military industrial complex should become the locomotive of the economy development. In particular, he has noted that the current situation in Russia is very similar to the one that was observed in the late 1930-s when the Soviet Union was forced to become engaged in the rapid industrialization in order to defend itself, while being in economic and political isolation. Therefore, the military industrial complex should become the locomotive for the modern Russia development, just as it has been during the last 7 decades.

Yet, not only Dmitry Rogozin, deputy chairman of the Russian government who supervises the military industry operations, but also a few other 'heavyweights' (Union of Mechanical Engineers, Russian Technologies State Corporation, etc.) share this view. For instance, Yuri Koptev, chairman of the Scientific and Technical Council of Russian Technologies State Corporation, has recalled more than once that president Vladimir Putin has set the goal to profoundly diversify and improve the technical infrastructure and technology within the defense industry as it is the locomotive of our economy. According to him, in the Soviet times, a lot of innovations that were coming from the military industrial complex were introduced into the civilian life, the complex provided products for the society to use. Aleksandr Ageyev, director of the Institute for Economic Strategies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, also believes that the economy development is not possible without the military industrial complex modernization. According to him, the military industrial complex is at the core of the economy, and technology development, employment, and security depend on it. This is why the Russian military industrial complex has traditionally played the role of a locomotive in the economy development process. Moreover, the military industrial complex depends very much on the goal-setting done by the government, so in an economy based on private property in which private traders are only interested in getting profit, the military industrial complex can become an instrument of economic modernization not only due to the military products supply. One needs to understand that the economic development issue is an issue whose resolution depends on a number of factors, i.e. ruble stabilization, financial policy, and so on. The WWI is a war that is based on the land-based weaponry use; the WWII is a war where the flying motors and artillery were used; the war

of the future is associated with the use of robots, drones, genetic systems, new materials. This is why the military industrial complex should be modernized, and the economy modernization process will run in parallel.

Given the fact that the news on the fundamentally innovative and advanced weapons development within the framework of the military industrial complex has been increasingly circulating in recent years, military lobbyists' voices begin sounding increasingly confident. It is noteworthy that the defense industry representatives often go beyond civilian researchers as far as innovative project development is concerned. The so-called exoskeleton, a special suit with embedded special devices, that allows a person to carry extra load, can be an example of this. Skolkovo center representatives informed the public about the innovation in August 2014 while getting as much media coverage as possible when showing the exoskeleton that could make life of disabled persons easier. At the same time, it is well-known that such products developed for military use have been available to the military industrial complex for a long time, and it is probable that they were produced on a large scale.

Moreover, there are two factors that play into the hands of the 'hawkish' innovative development scenario champions. Firstly, sharp aggravation of relations between Russia and the US and the EU, with the countries being on the verge of a new Cold War, calls for an appropriate Russian Army supply of precision weapons and other advanced products. Secondly, the official data on the growth of military technical cooperation between Russia and other countries of the world are impressive. The unofficial data might be even more impressive. For example, Russian weapons sales on the foreign markets totaled USD 15.7 billion in 2013. Thus, according to pro-defense industry activists, the defense industry development will let the country obtain a lot of funds immediately. However, the liberal groups within the establishment are pronouncedly against the 'hawks'. They fear the militarization of the country and do not want the relations between Russia and the West to become even more aggravated. In addition, despite all the patriotic attitudes, the Russian people still have that fear of becoming poor that they had in the 1980-s. At that period, a sharp increase in military spending undermined the social and economic stability in the Soviet Union and led to civil industries' degradation.

Those who support the idea of creating incentives for the military industrial complex develop-

ment go hand in hand with the new industrial policy champions who are also in favor of improving the real sector financing. They believe that not all the global leaders make a bet on the breakthroughs of the postmodern period. Many achieve the goal of advanced development by using existing industrial capacity in a new way and by introducing new technologies. New industrial policy champions indicate that the Russian industrial potential degraded seriously and was ruined in the 1990-s. This led to the loss of the economic position on the international arena in a period following a systemic crisis. According to them, the political and economic renaissance of the 2000-s was largely due to the extensive use of oil and gas, while the industrial enterprises that had survived during the period of reforms of the 1990-s, continued struggling without the strong public support.

At the same time, after getting solid financial investment, the country's industry could make a major innovation-based breakthrough. The import substitution campaign that followed the introduction of Western sanctions against Russia let the domestic producers become more optimistic. In August 2014 high-class projects were launched that supported industrial development programs that were associated with both heavy and light industry development. However, this project has its shortcomings too. Firstly, full recreation of potential in the Russian production sector is a very ambitious goal, if we mean ensuring self-sufficiency.

In addition to the substantial financial investment issue, there is yet another issue the Russian government is thinking about. It has doubts as to the funds use efficiency, if funds are ever allocated. After all, the corruption factor plays virtually the most important part in the Russian economy, and at least half the amount of the entire project financing is misappropriated because of this factor's impact. At the same time, the industrial development theory champions have repeatedly tried to use the funds from the Stabilization Fund and the Reserve Fund of the Russian Federation using the pretext of production sector development requirements, which led to acquiring serious enemies among the management of the Ministry of Finance and even the Ministry of Economic Development.

In addition, there are strong doubts about the Russian industries' competitiveness even following the product quality improvement. The leading Western countries are far ahead of us in technology development in some areas (especially non-military development sectors) and the third world countries have an opportunity to lower the prices significantly because of the availability of cheap labor force. The

choice of the new industrial policy as a strategic innovative development trend will largely depend on the external environment and on the degree of coherency of the public import substitution policy. In any case, pro-industrial policy activists will manage to get funds for innovative development financing, but it is unlikely that the domestic civil industry would become a driver of growth.

In addition to those listed above, there is yet another national innovative breakthrough project. All bets in it are put on the nuclear industry development. It is clear that Rosatom management and Sergei Kiriyenko, head of Rosatom, are the key champions of this theory. The theory key point is that the nuclear industry, while being a special strategic industry, not only maintained its strong potential preserved in the Soviet era, but also improved it during the 1990-s and the 2000-s. Moreover, the sector representatives managed to get profit from entering the foreign markets and acquired reliable and creditworthy customers who were often the political enemies. For instance, Rosatom cooperates with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States demonstrating the same degree of productivity. It is also worth mentioning that the nuclear industry uses powerful technology that not just meets the international standards but surpasses them in certain areas.

At the same time, this project is controversial to a large extent. The 'Chernobyl complex' is still observed in the post-Soviet states and in Europe, and the public demonstrates absolute disapproval when it comes to the projects associated with posing a threat to the environment. It is difficult for the innovative project managers to get Russian government' approval because of some HR decisions made. Sergei Kiriyenko is largely perceived as an 'alien' by the Putin's 'St. Petersburg team' members. As a consequence, his agency's projects are unlikely to be considered a priority. In addition, the head of Rosatom has a reputation of being a liberal and a scientologist, which is of dubious value, given the presence of patriotic enthusiasm and the dominant ideology of 'empire values', which provides a major advantage to Kiriyenko's government opponents.

Thus, we can observe that a pointed debate about the major trends in innovative modernization policy is still going on in Russia while often reflecting the selfish lobbyists' interests. The president of the Russian Federation prefers to sit on the fence and abstain from taking a final decision in favor of some group of lobbyists in order to maintain the unity of the 'ruling class'. Anyway, given

the sharp aggravation of relations between Russia and the West, the decision as to what the priorities should be in the innovation-based political and economic modernization will have to be made, and, under such galvanizing circumstances, the pro-defense and nuclear industry activists have the best chance to win, as far as the strategic acceptance of their theory is concerned.

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