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**POLITICAL ELITES FACING THE  
CHALLENGE OF COVID-19: PROBLEMS OF  
IDENTITY AND FUTURE OF SOCIO-  
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract.**

Recent political events show that the Covid-19 crisis is accompanied by a partial loss of identity by many political structures and individual political actors. The question of "who we are" and "who are they" is again acutely faced by modern mankind which faced with the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic and forced to revise its previous theories and values that have not passed the test of time. The coronavirus epidemic has become a kind of dividing barrier and will go down in history as the moment when it was "before" and has become "after". Currently, this transition is still faintly felt. But the feeling of it will grow with the passage of time. By 2020, the world has reached the border of a serious crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic that happened at the beginning of the year has become a kind of catalyst, having accelerated all processes and revealed all the weaknesses of the world system built by the United States. It turned out that the old proven schemes in which the elites are accustomed to operate are violated and are ineffective. There is simply no time to search and test new algorithms. Elites and their leaders have to improvise during the course of events, and this improvisation is not always successful for them. The ruling elites lost their former confidence and an identity crisis

began inside of them. It is the analysis of this crisis that this work is devoted to.

**Keywords:** elite, identity, world crisis, coronavirus (Covid-19), shock, chaos, threats, conflicts, responsibility, solidarity, world leadership, globalism.

### **I. Consideration of question.**

In the political process of modern societies, a change in worldview coordinates is also taking place, the once stable value-normative systems which ensured the stability and resistance of socio-political relations and acted as a framework for identity and group solidarity are being transformed. Various scenarios for the development of society, transformation of socio-political and economic organization are projected in modern research [Mamychev A.Yu., 2020]. Summarizing the latter, we can conditionally distinguish three groups of approaches.

*The first group* predicts the development of convergence processes of the traditional value and normative foundations of society with innovative priorities, benchmarks and value attitudes of digital culture. It is clearly seen during a pandemic that the latter both entered into contradictions and converged (mixed, fused) in different spheres of social interaction.

*The second projected scenario* is, on the contrary, the replacement and erasure of the traditional foundations of society, the replacement of the old spiritual and moral systems with new post-humanitarian values and, in general, the displacement of social development guidelines from the new digital reality. For example, Adam Greenfield designates the modern period of development as the “*era of post-humanitarian everyday life*”, where the main guidelines for future development and key priorities of transformation “are determined not so much by our needs as by the needs

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of systems (technical, information, digital – *author's note*) that nominally serve us, but for those human perception, scales proportionate to a person and his desires *are not the main measure of value* (emphasis ours – *author's note*)” [A. Greenfield, 2018, p. 249].

*The third scenario* is co-evolution, in the context of which it is argued that a fundamentally new system of complex forms of interaction between social and digital priorities will be formed, where the former and the latter will retain their uniqueness, and the very “interweaving” of social and digital foundations and forms of social and political communication is impossible. The latter “presupposes complex interaction as a functional unity of its parts with the preservation of their substrate differences, independence ... In the circumstances of the innovationism expansion, this is the only possible attitude towards technologies” [Kutyrev V.A., 2020, p. 8].

The Covid-19 crisis that erupted in early 2020 caused numerous unpredictable losses in the economy, politics and healthcare. Moreover, even the world's leading economists and political scientists do not undertake to predict all its consequences. None of them know how the world economy will recover from the shock it has endured and what will happen to the political systems. Conflicting forecasts create an eclectic picture of the world, devoid of common meaning and the same assessment. All this creates chaos and increases the risks of unpredictability. The global project has cracked and it seems that its ideologists and apologists have no recipe for how to get out of this difficult situation. Expert communities have spoken openly about the crisis of solidarity even in those structures that were previously proud of their collective decisions

and iron consensus. There is no unity among the scientific expert community itself - the scientific elites either remain silent or give extremely contradictory assessments and forecasts [Kapto A.S., 2019].

The general world crisis consists of a whole set of secondary crises - the crisis of globalization, the crisis of US world leadership, the crisis of European unity, the crisis of solidarity, etc. In sum, they make up what is commonly called the global financial and economic crisis, which began in 2008 and has not yet ended. The task of this work is to assess current events that are not yet completed and therefore are rationally extremely unpredictable. The object of this work will be a new wave of the global financial and economic crisis provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the subject will be the reaction of the world's political elites to these events. All of the aforementioned secondary crises directly or indirectly relate to the problem of identity, the need to adjust or even radically revise the existing systems of values and ideals.

## **II. The crisis of globalism.**

In 2020, the process of globalization actually stopped, and it turned out to be very difficult to restart it. Many experts talked about the end of the American-style globalization project and the end of the US world leadership. Indeed, if in the course of previous global crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 2014 Ebola epidemic, the United States assumed the role of global leader, then in 2020 the US administration resigned from the position of leader in saving the world. President Donald Trump has made it clear that he cares much more about America's greatness than about the future of humanity. [Harari, 2020]

The growth of crisis phenomena in the globalization process was also recorded by the supporters of globalization themselves, in whose opinion

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globalism solves some problems and creates others. [Stiglitz, 2016] Moreover, the elite will not be able to cope with the new problems, since they are accustomed to working according to the old protocol norms. Back in 2011, after the first wave of the global financial and economic crisis, D.Stiglitz pointed out that the United States would no longer be able to be what it was before; that the world is changing, and the States must not only rebuild themselves, but also have time to lead this process of change. [Stiglitz, 2011] At the same time, the crisis of globalism is understood by many as an ideological crisis of the very liberalism in general.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown that the global cooperation of the world's leading countries needs serious adjustment. During the coronavirus pandemic crisis, most countries isolated themselves, deciding to deal with this problem on their own. The decisions of many European Union countries to isolate themselves caused a wave of criticism and the threat of the collapse of unity, about which the Brussels European bureaucracy spoke so often. According to Russian experts, the general "decline in attention to the problems of globalization in recent years is due to the development of the phase of chaos and, as a reaction to it, the activation of the trend of isolationism." [Lebedeva, 2019: 32]

Countries should be ready to share information openly and be able to seek advice and receive qualified scientific knowledge. The world community also needs a global effort to manufacture and distribute medical devices. *One of the most influential thinkers of the modern world, Israeli historian and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari (author of the bestselling books "Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind" and "Homo Deus. A Brief History of Tomorrow"), argued that "just as countries*

nationalize key industries during wars, the human war against the coronavirus may require us to “humanize” critical production lines. A rich country with few coronavirus cases should be prepared to send the necessary equipment to a poorer country, in many cases believing that if and when it subsequently needs help, other countries will come to its aid.” [Harari, 2020] It is necessary to strike at the centers of the epidemic, and not to scatter efforts on all local foci.

Global cooperation is vital on the economic front as well. Considering the global nature of the economy and supply chains, if each government does its own thing while completely ignoring the others, the result will be the chaos and a deepening crisis. For a softer way out of the crisis, the world elites need a global action plan, and they needed it yesterday already. [Harari, 2020]

The crisis has complicated not only the economic schemes for the exchange of goods, brought to naught the tourism industry, but also interrupted scientific contacts in some segments. The latter can turn out to be a very serious problem, since the coordination and cooperation of the entire world scientific community is required for a successful fight against coronavirus. The role of scientific elites is increasing many times over. And in this growth we can see a clear domination of the principle of meritocracy over the principles of oligarchism.

There is an obvious crisis of global *solidarity* [Baranov P.P., 2019]. If politicians choose disunity and can convince and entice their citizens with them, this will not only prolong the crisis but will likely lead to even worse disasters in the future. “If we choose global solidarity, it will be a victory not only against the coronavirus but also against all future epidemics and crises that could hit humanity in the 21st century.” [Harari, 2020] The



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world is at war with the coronavirus, and the virus could redistribute the order. A pandemic has the potential to undermine the power of the dollar, and with it the era of overconsumption is ending. The world is going into economy mode (exorbitant expenses will be revised).

The crisis of globalization is also associated with the crisis of world political and economic leadership, which the world community is currently experiencing. For many countries previously focused exclusively on the main hegemon (the United States), difficult times now have come. Their policy of focusing on Washington is bursting at the seams and deeply cracked. And all because their overlord is reneging on his previous obligations since he himself has become chronically lacking in resources to support his foreign policy.

III. Political elites and problems of world leadership. The policy of the global regulator (USA & Co.) is anti-strategic in nature. It is mostly random. The split of the elites in the United States is putting this country on the brink of a cold civil war. Hopes for the strength of economic ties with China did not materialize. As you know, Chimerica denoted a bipolar picture of the world, where there is confrontation and cooperation between two superpowers - the United States and People's China. America hastily considered China to be its part as very powerful leading part. They often viewed the Chinese financial system as an extension of the American system. But Chimerica went deep cracks when the US decided to enter the Chinese market and open it up to its multinationals. And the alliance of the liberal US and communist China turned out to be a chimera.

American political scientist and professor of the Hamline University David Schultz argues that the United States is losing its economic

independence. The economic recovery will go much slower than in 2008. In his opinion, in the near future China will become the first world power, since the USA no longer dominates the world economy.

According to Chinese experts, in the future, there will be more noticeable double standards between China and the United States, and competition, deterrence and resistance to containment will be more noticeable. [赵全胜, 2012]. Zbigniew Brzezinski once insisted on the need to form The Group of Two (G2) with the participation of China and the United States. Henry Kissinger, the former US State Secretary also spoke about the fact that these two powers should form the core of the future world order. Back in 2018-2019, in The Group of Two the first cannons of the trade war thundered. It seemed to the US that they were shooting at China. It turned out that they were shooting themselves. For a long time, the American political elites will not be able to come to terms with the loss of the first power status. But the more they persist in upholding their outgoing hegemony the more tragic a multipolar world with completely different global centers of power will be for them.

World systems have lost their stability and have become more sensitive to crisis changes. The danger of an imbalance of power and the risk of conflicts are entering an active phase of development have increased. Many organizations have lost their former authority and status [Mamychev A.Yu., 2019]. They are no longer what they were before. The loss of orientation led to an identity crisis.

To be fair, it should be noted that the American elites themselves long before this had very serious claims to their authorities regarding how they provided (or rather, did not provide) the US world leadership. Thus, even before his election, D. Trump accused Barack Obama of missing the

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moment to strengthen America and plunging it into a severe crisis of self-destruction. [Crippled America, 2015] B. Obama himself blamed his predecessor, Republican President D. Bush Jr. for his difficulties and blamed him for inaction and criminal self-confidence. The latter, in turn, accused the democrat B. Clinton of not finishing off Russia in time after the collapse of the USSR, etc. [Bush, 2010] There is no need to speak about the accusations of D. Trump himself of incompetence and betrayal of the US national interests. [Clinton, 2017] There were also those who insisted that the American elites had lost their sense of reality and were leading the country towards imminent disaster. [Paul Craig Roberts, 2014] Some European politicians who believed that Europe was losing its monopoly on political leadership also languished with a premonition of the impending turmoil. [Macron, 2016; Hollande, 2018] Thus, the split of the elites in the United States was superimposed on the crisis of their world leadership which significantly increased the instability of the world order built by Washington. The Hegemon himself renounced his obligations. Olympus has become empty. [Harari, 2020]

The Covid-19 crisis is most often characterized by analysts as a shock that causes the most real panic and confusion in the power structures. The coronavirus will be a stress test for many governments. Thomas Frey, executive director of the Da Vinci Institute, pointed out that "by quarantining millions, we have pressed a giant reset button for all of humanity in many areas of life." At the same time, the "state of fear and panic" plays a significant role in this situation. [Frey, 2020] This is exactly what the Western European EU members experienced when, during the

pandemic, their notorious unity cracked at the seams and the voice of Eurosceptics spoke even more strongly.

### **III. Problems of European Union.**

The UK's exit from the EU punched the budget deficit by almost 20%, which already required a reduction in overall spending. The resource base of donor countries has shrunk. EU members from Central and Eastern Europe, who were the main beneficiaries, find themselves "up in the air" and insist that "old Europe" continue the funding program. [Coronavirus, 2020]

Brussels has no clear plan to get the EU out of the crisis. A serious economic depression will put even the rich EU countries with a choice - why should they finance "others" when they need to pull themselves out of the quagmire. One of the main problems of the EU economy is the overvalued euro, which increases the cost of production and provision of services. In this regard, the question arises, how to get out of depression - together or separately? The latter implies leaving the European Union, or limiting one's presence in it. Some analysts point out that this "exit from the influence of Eurocracy will take place not into a void, but into a zone of Russian gravity. There is only one counterbalance on the continent in Europe - this is Russia, and many European peoples will now begin to seek normalization of relations with it. We are witnessing the emergence of centrifugal trends in the EU." [Coronavirus, 2020] During the Covid-19 quarantine, some national leaders of the EU expressed doubts about their continued stay in this Union, which did not meet their expectations. It turned out that Europe does not want to decide anything for itself. The problem of European sovereignty turned out to be a dangerous and

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forbidden topic. The heyday of European integration has passed, and there will be no such comfort.

Among the pessimists was the leader of the French political party "National Front" ("National Association") Marine Le Pen, who said that the coronavirus heralds the collapse of the European Union according to the scenario of the USSR - the Soviet empire also collapsed due to its "ideological absurdity". In her opinion, the days of the European Union which is an "artificial construction" are numbered. In return, Le Pen proposes to create a "Europe of Nations" based on respect for the national characteristics of each country. The French politician noted that the coronavirus crisis marked the beginning of these changes, bringing back words such as "borders", "sovereignty" and "national interests" to Europeans. [Coronavirus, 2020]

Her ardent opponent, financier George Soros, also warned about the threat of disintegration. Both of these predictions came after the EU leadership, for the first time in history, threatened to impose sanctions on its pivotal country, Germany. Will Germany leave the European Union because of the conflict with Brussels, as Britain has already done? [Coronavirus, 2020] During the pandemic, the EU's political elites looked extremely confused. Their behavior grew in discontent and irritation with the Brussels bureaucracy. Eurosceptics got another reason to doubt the durability of the EU's declarations of solidarity and integrity of the policy pursued by the official Brussels.

French President E. Macron also spoke about the need to reform the political system. Judging by many of his statements, he adheres to the principle of situational ideology (when necessary, he can be right, when

necessary - left, etc.). "I decided not to become a prisoner of the disagreements of a past era. - He stated in one of his works. - If by liberalism we mean trust in a person, I definitely agree to be a liberal. But, on the other hand, being leftist means thinking that the poorest and the weakest should be protected without being discriminated against, then in this case I will willingly agree to be leftist " [Macron, 2016: 46]. The President has stressed many times that traditional political systems are increasingly failing and have begun to fail in allowing politicians to respond to the challenges of the world and the country.

V. Lost elitism. Among the losses incurred by the world community from the Covid-19 pandemic, the most imperceptible, but not the safest one, was the partial loss of identity by the subjects of politics. This mainly affected representatives of political elites and their leaders. Their image suffered the most from Covid-19 - their competence has had serious restrictive barriers. Therefore, along with the economic and political crisis, the crisis of the elites themselves should be also mentioned. And a clear sign of this crisis is the loss of the usual identity by the elites.

As it is known, loss of sameness is a serious violation of identity. Many political actors have a clear deficit in a concentrated form to express their former belonging to those structures or those statuses that they previously occupied. It was the elite status positions that suffered the damage. Many of them have disappeared during the pandemic from the information political space. They went into "creative quarantine". The official statements were inconsistent and fragmentary.

The main problem for the elites is that the crisis of their own identity was superimposed on the global crisis [Vorontsov, 2018]

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The elitological community noted that in 2010s criticism of political elites regarding their professional level of training increased. People with mediocre knowledge of political science basics and political realities came to power. They are used to acting in a formulaic manner, in accordance with the rules of familiar patterns. Taking initiative and going beyond these proven formulas was not within their purview. They deliberately avoided solving serious problems focusing public attention on the problems they invented. As a result, at the first serious collision with objective reality, all their "knowledge base" turned out to be unnecessary trash. Fashionable theories in the spirit of Z. Brzezinski and F. Fukuyama do not help either. K. Popper's dogmas about an open prosperous society also turned out to be an empty fantasy. The usual comfortable unipolar world turned out to be a glass castle on the sand, and popular scientific theories - untenable scholastic constructions.

Instead of a scientific explanation of what is happening in the civilized and educated world, various kinds of conspiracy theories and outright fakes are spreading. Elites began to trust conspiracy theorists more than political scientists. And these are the fruits of Western university education. They believe in what is convenient and beneficial for them. They are still not interested in the truth. They live in a post-truth world. In such conditions, the elite itself also receives the prefix "post". By virtue of all these circumstances, the elites themselves turn out to be invented, turn out to be a kind of political fake. It gives rise to the effect of the withdrawal of the elites - the elites sit quietly and keep their distance from all dangerous events: some of them are afraid, others simply cannot do

anything. As a result it paralyzes the will of the elite of the politicians masses making it incapacitated.

The loss of elite identity is the most serious loss of today's political elites. We can talk about a systemic failure in the professional activities of elite groups. Partial or complete loss of identity threatens the elites themselves with serious systemic problems. Their new norm may turn out to be completely unacceptable for the previous norm of their existence, which may erase and annul all their previous achievements. Elites had a hard time of understanding each other before. Now they face a real war of meanings. The crisis of the elites is a crisis of the quality of not only the ideas they produce, but also a crisis of the very idea of the elite. The boundaries of this idea are blurring, the criteria are becoming more simplified and poorly verifiable. All this makes the elite little recognizable not only for the scientific community, but also for themselves. The struggle for own identity threatens with much more acute problems and conflicts [Kapto A.S., 2019].

Thus, the coronavirus epidemic turned out to be a serious test for society and governments of states of their responsible behavior and the fulfillment of their civic and professional duties. At the same time, the role of the scientific expert community, the so-called scientific elite, is increasing. However, the lack of consensus among all these three elements (society, government and scientific elites) raises serious concerns about an effective solution to the Covid-19 problem and the next round of the global financial and economic crisis. Covid-19 itself is not so terrible as the abyss of global economic catastrophe that has been opened up after it. But it is known that any crisis opens up new opportunities. The most important thing is to understand them and use them on time...



**VI. Conclusions.**

As political history testifies, it is up to the elites to choose a strategy to combat Covid-19. And this choice is not always correct and responsible. More often the solution to a problem is drowned in endless discussions and mutual recriminations. Elites are replicating old protocols of competition. In such situations, there is no talk of constructive discourse at all. The coronavirus crisis has highlighted the weaknesses where the elites are most vulnerable. In particular, it exposed economic, political and, most importantly, unexpectedly revealed medical problems. The world's best health care system (as it was believed), unexpectedly for many people, has failed. The mortality statistics from coronavirus in the United States and the United Kingdom at the end of May 2020 beat all anti-records. [Chris Harris, 2020] Ill-wishers started talking about the complete failure of health policy in these leading countries of the Western world. And it was the top leadership of these countries that were named guilty. Instead of fixing the weaknesses in the health care system, the US authorities blamed China and the WHO for everything, and defiantly withdrew from this organization. Then, when it was necessary to unite in the fight against the coronavirus, some politicians continued to incite hostility, thereby trying to absolve themselves of responsibility for previously made unpopular decisions. The crisis of 2020 exposed the crisis of the elites with anatomical precision, putting them before a serious civilizational choice - whether they will remain within the framework of a decaying unipolar world or will go over to the side of flourishing diversity.

As result, political elites wanted to see only their local interests and searched possibilities to consideration other countries or organizations as main their problems. We can conclude that many politics underestimate situation with pandemic because considered it only from their egoistic positions. Some politic elites in the world tried to use speculative policy, but it can give correct decisions.

In this situation can be possible to consider this problem from different aspects. Clearly, the Covid-19 could not to destroy many economic branches or international trade, but it can be give important experience for struggle against more serious situations in the future. At first, It can be useful with mobilizations of the different kinds of the resources, reaction for complicated situation, fast contacts with different countries and organizations.

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