

Markku Kivinen

Finnish Center for Russian and Eastern European studies

The Problem of the middle Classes in Russia

New property based classes, who were not part of the former nomenclature, were born again in Russia during the rapid and dramatic privatization process. They had made use of the market opportunities since late 1980s. A decisive change of the ownership structure started with President Vladimir Putin, when he made a deal with most of the oligarchs that they would not interfere politics too much. The siloviki, the people close to the Putin administration, were installed to lead many of the main Russian enterprises. The result is a powerful propertied class thriving in the context of weak or even absent, capitalist market institutions. Thus, the oligarchic capitalism became a bureaucratic capitalism. Russian transition has intensified sociological studies on the formation of middle class. These studies have been significantly inspired by a rather essentialist approach to class identity, consciousness and habitus of classes. The middle class is suggested to be in its essence legalistic, disciplined and full of entrepreneurial spirit. I challenge the limited scope of these studies by analyzing the structuration process of classes in concrete terms, taking into account the concrete levels of class situation and forms of organization. It is especially important to understand the neglected connection between the class structuration and formation of the welfare regime. At the same time, this should not imply that the other stakeholders and agencies would be neglected, rather the opposite.