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**КОММЕМОРАЦИЯ КАК КОМПОНЕНТ СИМВОЛИЧЕСКОЙ  
ПОЛИТИКИ В ПОСТСОВЕТСКОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ: СОЦИАЛЬНО-  
ФИЛОСОФСКИЙ АСПЕКТ**

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**THE COMMERATION AS A COMPONENT OF SYMBOLIC POLICY IN  
THE POST-SOVIET SOCIETY: A SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECT**

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## АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматривается роль символической политике в политических процессах постсоветского общества, определяется значение коммеморативных практик в ее формировании и реализации в социальном контексте, рассматриваются угрозы абсолютизации социокультурного компонента в политической жизни постсоветского общества.

## ABSTRACT

This article is about the role of symbolic politics in the political processes of post-Soviet society, the importance of commemorative practices in its formation and implementation in a social context, the threats of absolutization of the sociocultural component in the political life of post-Soviet society.

**Ключевые слова:** идейно-символическое пространство; постсоветское общество; символическая политика; историческая память; коммеморация.

**Keywords:** ideological and symbolic space; post-Soviet society; symbolic politics; historical memory; commemoration.

The wide use of symbolic means in the political process is a characteristic feature of the modern stage of political development of the post-Soviet society, regardless of its localization in the political and geographical angle or the specifics of historical and cultural heritage.

Almost any post-Soviet society is characterized by an abundance of controversial and crisis phenomena in socio-political life, creating difficulties for rooting democratic principles and practices in socio-political life (for example, the events of August 2019 that unfolded around the ex-president of Kyrgyzstan, vivid confirmation of this). The characteristic features of its newest historical life are the constant generation by the elites of conflicts about the models and the vector of socio-political and economic development, the weak effectiveness of legal institutions and mechanisms in resolving various conflicts, the public defamation of the idea of a nationwide consensus without victimizing opponents or political adversaries. In this case, symbolic policy is an instrument that is mainly used to solve the conjunctural

problems of internal policy, which do not imply a significant change in the vector of social and political development of the country.

Thereby, the current state of socio-political practice indicates a problem with the creation and development of the institutional infrastructure of the modern state in the post-Soviet space. This problem is caused by the difference of the normative-value foundations of modernization processes and ethnocultural codes of the population, that allow to manipulate the collective memory for legitimization of the existing political order. In the epistemological aspect, this actualizes as identifying the role of the sociocultural factor in the political life of post-Soviet society, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the mechanisms for the implementation of symbolic politics.

In this case, this research problem can be considered in the context of the task of identifying the specifics of national-cultural and political development, which is the product of the influence of mentality and historical memory on the parameters of the historical development of national statehood. At the same time, mentality and historical memory, which can rightfully be considered as determinants of the formation process and development of political institutions, are interconnected in dialectical connection. They express ethnocultural collectivist specificity and “reproduce from generation to generation all the experience accumulated by mankind” [5, 207].

In a broad sense, mentality is understood as the totality and specific form of organization of mental properties and qualities, characteristics and manifestations of both social communities and individuals. As noted by V.V. Kirienko, mental “norms are emotionally saturated, difficult to formulate and, as a rule, fixed in the sociocultural behavior imperatives that are passed down from generation to generation: customs, traditions, beliefs” [4, 91]. Mentality acts as a kind of repository of meanings and discourses legitimized by historical tradition, allowing individuals belonging to a particular ethnic community to perceive and evaluate the surrounding socio-political reality in a uniform manner. Thanks to the mentality, the individual can build a rational model of his own activity in the political sphere of society, being guided in accordance with certain established norms and patterns of behavior, which allows it to be adequately perceived and understood by other actors. In this case, the mentality of the

community performs organizing and integrating functions, creating a single political and psychological semantic space for all its members. In its turn, historical memory “is not only a way of the existence of all structural elements of culture, but also a way of expressing and preserving the mentality of the people” [5, 207].

In this way, in the aspect of the studied problem at the societal level, mentality and historical memory contribute to maintaining the continuity of the existence of the political system, exerting a direct influence on individuals’ choice of political orientations and behavior patterns. The mentality of the community is saturated with structures and images formed in the process of its historical development and having a long-term, irreducible nature of one or two generations, the nature of its existence. However, the historical conditions in which these or those archetypes of mentality were formed are qualitatively different from the realities of modernity, therefore the formation of national statehood takes place in a heterogeneous sociocultural space. In this space fancily coexist as modern concepts and archaic meanings and values actualized by the historical memory of the community. All this together in the process of social communications creates a complex context for the functioning of the modern political system institutions.

Identification of the role of sociocultural factor in the political life of post-Soviet society in the political and philosophical perspective can be considered in the context of the characterization and evaluation of the trajectory of political dynamics of post-Soviet society in the system of sociocultural coordinates. The problem, however, is that such a system of symbolic coordinates should not be based solely on formalized democratic models that emphasize the institutional context of modernization. At the same time, it must take into account the historical heritage and cultural experience of a particular community, through which democracy, as a universal form of political organization of the community, arises, is rooted and reproduces itself locally, "with a clearly limited demos and state territory" [16, 33].

In this case, this means that very specific phenomena begin to appear as components of the political process: “sustainable cultural traditions and stereotypes that determine the perception of the past within the framework of this community; the

activities of the creators of collective memory, who manipulate traditions, create, support, actualize or displace one or another of them, depending on their interests; the consumers activity of collective memory, which, in accordance with purposes and interests of accept, reject or transform something that offers them a cultural tradition and memory creators” [6, 32]. This situation actualizes the issue of both the subjectivity of the actors of modernization processes and the moral and political responsibility for their results in the medium and long term perspective.

In the epistemological aspect, the problematics of commemoration, considered as a component of symbolic politics in post-Soviet society, actualizes the issue of an adequate understanding of the acting and cognizing subject. Indeed, such phenomena are becoming the subject of research as processes and mechanisms of constructing sociocultural time, processes of pluralization of the mnemonic space of society and its structural differentiation, the transformation of collective memory into a retroactive process, which based on the contextual framework of the present and through the practice of remembering and forgetting, constantly reconstructs the past, both individual and social-group. However, it is necessary to take into account the fact that manipulations with memory (both historical and collective) reflect the specific political and economic interests of the elites, which “play a special role in the implementation of historical politics, because they have access to the most influential forms of public discourse (and, as a rule, control over them), in particular, to the discourses of the mass media, politics, science, education and the state bureaucracy” [1, 23]. Another thing is that the intellectual and political elites usually prefer to mask their interests with discourses of political responsibility and moral duty to the nation, which are actively broadcast by the mass communication. Nevertheless, this situation challenges the comprehension of the essence of the historical past or, in principle, eliminates this possibility, turning the past into a dynamic conglomerate of historical narratives, facts, epistemological schemes and models.

The task of identifying specifics of the formation of political and ideological doctrines and party programs by competing political actors of post-Soviet countries, their presentation and evaluation in the public sphere, the construction of ideological

discourses and their use as tools, as political governance and manipulation of public opinion, in the political perspective, actualizes the problem of determining the role of the sociocultural factor in the political life of post-soviet society. The heuristic and relevance of this approach is confirmed by the fact that politically motivated and ideologically biased treatment of historical facts by various political actors, their construction of their own versions of national history, lists of national heroes and criteria for evaluating their activities have become an integral part of the political life of post-Soviet society. For example, V.A. Achkasov writes that “the scope with which in the post-socialist world states exploit the historical past for political purposes is astounding. The ideological reformatting and recoding of a common past, especially the recent one, has turned over the past decade into one of the most important tools for exercising political influence inside and outside the new states. So-called historical politics or “politics of memory” has become an instrument of national building (construction of national identity), ensuring the internal and external legitimacy of the state, political mobilization and consolidation of society in the entire post-socialist space” [2, 116].

Thereby, the complex structure of sociocultural reality, which determines the contradictory nature of the processes of social transformations in the post-Soviet space, actualizes the need to develop an adequate approach to the study of the phenomenon of senses and meanings, concepts and values, in modern conditions actually virtualizing social institutions, communities, processes and norms. Its heuristic potential is determined by the extent to which the research tool allows explicating the role of subjective representations in a real social context.

One of these approaches is the “memory studies”, actualizing the ideas of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber in the modern socio-humanitarian context. In general, they focus on a theoretical understanding of the problems of historical reflection at the group and social level, on the construction and/or re(de)construction of the sociocultural space and forms of representation of group identity. The main conceptual ideas and methodological principles of this approach are presented in the works of such philosophers, historians and psychologists as M. Halbwachs, A. Warburg, W.

Benjamin, F. Bartlett, P. Ricoeur, E. Zerubavel, J. Le Goff, J. Assmann, A. Assmann, P. Nora, F. Ankersmit, F. Yates, S. Žižek, A. Megill, J. Rüsen, P. Burke, P.H. Hutton, M. Ferretti, T. Judt and others. However, the current state of this direction is an object of criticism, the main thesis of which is written by Y.A. Safronova: “Memory studies continue to be an amazingly diverse research field that does not have a common conceptual framework, methodology or universally recognized research subjects” [11, p. 26].

The methodological focus of this research approach is the phenomenon of commemoration, as a process of biased fixation and the transfer of collective memories of past historical events. In a substantial aspect, this term is interpreted as follows: “In the narrow sense of the word, it is the perpetuation of the memory of events: the construction of monuments, the organization of museums, the determination of significant dates, holidays, public events and much more. It can be various artifacts, and ideas, and texts - that is positioned as a memorial activity. In a broad sense, this is all that connects a person with his past” [10, 82-83]. At the same time, the second side of the coin here is recommitment, which means a deliberate and conscious process of forgetting certain pages of the history of society, due to socio-psychological and political-ideological reasons.

It seems that “memorial studies” fully actualize the role of the phenomenon, practices and techniques of commemoration in the formation and implementation of symbolic politics in post-Soviet society. After all, they constantly accumulate and reproduce knowledge about collectively experienced events, about ancestors and contemporaries, about moral attitudes and moral imperatives of a particular community in the process of reproduction of social structures. That is why the American historian Allan Megill sees commemoration as a way of constructing and preserving a community within certain semantic and spatial boundaries, which allows him to “confirm the sense of his unity and community, strengthening the connections within the community through the relation shared by its members to past events, or, more precisely, through a shared attitude to the representation of past events” [8, 116].

The political science perspective of this approach focuses on the essence of the sphere of politics, as the activity of constructing a certain picture of the world and imposing on society legitimate schemes of vision, perception and understanding of social reality based on social memory in a broad sense. As Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes, political institutions are the environment in which there is constant work on the production of meanings, and all agents of the political field “are united by the claim to impose a legitimate vision of the social world, they all represent a place of internal struggle for the imposition of the prevailing principle of perception and division” [12, 120 –121]. The epiphenomenon of this is the ideologization of the historical past, giving it the status of a component of symbolic politics in the form of historical memory and its practical use to create a specific political context. At this point O. Yu. Malinova focuses attention, considering the politics of memory as a structural component of symbolic politics, when “historical politics turns out to be a special case of the politics of memory, which we propose to understand as the activity of the state and other actors, aimed at the approval of certain ideas about the collective past and the formation of the cultural infrastructure supporting them, educational policy, and in some cases legislative regulation. All three concepts — political use of the past, politics of memory and historical politics — can be regarded as manifestations of symbolic politics, i. e., public activities related to the production of various ways of interpreting social reality and the struggle for their dominance in public space” [9, 33].

The appeal to historical, not collective memory, is due to the differences between these two sociocultural phenomena. If collective memory is understood as a complex of myths, beliefs and ideas shared within a particular community that is a product of general social experience, then historical memory is a combination of pre-scientific, scientific, quasi-scientific and extrascientific knowledge and mass representations of society about a common past. On the one hand, as a sociocultural phenomenon, historical memory acts as an instrument of self-identification of the individual, social group and society as a whole, setting the referential framework of historical being. However, the problem is that in “modern, complex societies, the memory of historical events is heterogeneous: the identities of its constituent groups are based on different



historical myths, which is potentially a basis for conflict” [9, 33]. But, on the other hand, this term is an ideological construct that is used in the context of the task of artificially forming mass, everyday social representations of the past and national images and embodying them symbols, implementing in society a memory policy and commemorative practices for constituting and integrating social groups in the present. It should be noted that the transformation of history into memory, commemoration and tradition, according to A. Megill, inspires the reduction of history to the structure of thinking and action only in the present. In addition, it produces a tendency to eliminate its critical function, in fact replacing historical facts with artificially created cultural narratives and mental schemes of certain social groups.

For post-Soviet society, similar manipulations with the historical past are caused by completely utilitarian reasons: the necessity to form a national identity, legitimize the claims of post-Soviet political elites on power, the state or territory, moral justification used in socio-political life of violence. The concept of “politics of memory”, which represents such manipulative actions in the structure of symbolic politics, characterizes the practice of using and regulating historical memory by various political actors (state, parties, social movements, lobbying groups, etc.). All of them can appeal to universally valid moral norms and ethical principles, national historical and cultural heritage, but their resources are unequal, and “their distribution reflects the structure of relations of power and dominance” [9, 33].

Symbolic politics, as the activity of various political actors in the production of various ways of interpreting social reality and ensuring their dominance in public space, in the conditions of post-Soviet society, acts as a rather efficient, economical and effective means of political struggle [7]. It allows, through articulation and aggregation of verbally shaped ideas, presented in a rational-logical form (worldview principles, ideological concepts and doctrines, party programs, etc.), and non-verbal means of meaning (symbols, images, gestures, etc.) with minimal use of material resources, to ensure the dominance of some patterns of interpretation of social reality to the detriment of others, to achieve political mobilization of supporters and marginalization of opponents, to convert symbolic capital to other forms of resources.

In the process of using and interpreting the historical past by political actors, the ideological and symbolic space of post-Soviet society is of particular importance, as a specific environment and a special sociocultural mechanism of normative and symbolic production of politically significant meanings, images, symbols, mythologies and narratives. At the same time, the process of creating new cultural symbols, myths and values is accompanied by a gradual displacement of old ideals, values, mythologies and symbols to the periphery of public consciousness, and the historical specificity of post-Soviet society determines the problematic nature of the memory policy, regardless of the subject and the parameters of its implementation. In other words, in post-Soviet society, which clearly demonstrates the process of historical development of all post-Soviet states, the symbolic policy in general and the politics of memory in particular are characterized by ideological engagement (mainly based on primordialist concepts), a conflict nature and the lack of the possibility of achieving a national consensus on the assessment of the historical past community.

The practical implementation of symbolic politics in post-Soviet society is a complex and controversial process, which involves characterizing the sociocultural mechanisms through which this process is ensured in society. In this case, we are talking about commemorative practices, which are a special type of sociocultural activity that ensures intergenerational transmission of socially significant values, cultural experience and cultural heritage from the past to the future, their (re)construction and preservation in the historical memory of a particular ethno-national community. They are distinguished by selectivity, mobility, emotional richness and subjectivity, which are actualized in the corresponding historical narratives and representations, as derivatives of cognitive and mnemonic acts of the commemoration process.

As a result, only certain informational aspects about the historical past are updated and represented, both in the context of assessing the actual development of a group or society as a whole, and long-term projections of their development. Or characterizing this situation in the coordinate system of the constructivist approach, memory does not return the community to the past, but creates it through a variety of

cognitive and communicative acts of its members. Thus, commemorative practices are one of the essential sources of the constitution of ethnocultural, civic, and political identities, and serve to express group solidarity.

Memorandums of practice are the object of memory policy, they are implemented and reproduced both on the initiative of political actors and within the framework of various communities. At the same time, they simultaneously act as instruments and forms of production and translation of certain ways of interpreting social reality and behavior models that are significant for understanding social and political phenomena and processes. From the point of the nature view of origin and the functional load in the socio-political sphere of society, they can be considered in two interrelated aspects.

On the one hand, it is interesting to define the specifics of their design and reproduction in certain social and cultural contexts. Because commemorative practices can be purposefully initiated and artificially created for consumption by social groups, based on the socio-political interests of various actors (state, political parties, social movements, etc.), and then reproduced in the social environment with their active participation in organizational, managerial and resource support of this process. An example of this is the historical policy implemented by the state in Germany (where in the early 1980s appeared the concept of the *Geschichtspolitik*, which characterizes the party-political interpretation of the historical process imposed on society), Poland, the Baltic countries, Georgia and Ukraine. In addition, commemorative practices can be a natural product of the activities of various communities, acting as a resource for the formation and maintenance of group identity, as well as a means of political mobilization (for example, the traditions of the Cossacks have contributed to the preservation of this unique subethnos in the ups and downs of modern history of the Eastern Slavic countries).

On the other hand, there is some interest in the issue of the functional political and social burden of commemorative practices. After all, they are means of formation and actualization of ethno-nationalism, as a universal principle of the constitution of a citizen of the modern complex political-state community. Thus, Egbert Yang

emphasizes the genetic connection of democratic practices and the institutional foundations of the nation-state, taking into account that democracy and nationalism are "twins born of popular sovereignty" [16, 33]. It should be emphasized that the interpretation of cultural processes in the post-Soviet political and social spaces is heuristic in the context of modern views on the nature of nationalism, which allows explicating the production and reproduction of politically significant meanings in the context of the cultural space of post-Soviet society.

From the point of view of the outstanding German scientist Egbert Jahn, we can talk about two models of the actualization of ethno-nationalism: "Ethnic nationalism of state bearers can be inclusive, giving people of other ethnic origin the opportunity to join the dominant nation, accepting its cultural, linguistic, political, less often – religious attitudes, and exclusive containing a ban on assimilation" [15, 38]. Accordingly, commemorative practices can actualize either a constructivist or primordialist version of ethno-nationalism, creating the corresponding historical narratives that claim a national status, and determining the vector of development of the culture of society. By manifesting these practices in a real social space or virtual environment (for example, in the form of creating monuments, "places of memory", holding festivals, approving and celebrating commemorative dates, civic initiatives, etc.), political actors make their ethno-national content an object of public policy and reflection. That is why, as Egbert Yang emphasizes, when designing a national historical narrative, "each nation will tell a story about its heroes and rogue" [16, 152], minimizing the role of historical facts and maximizing the importance of ideology and cultural stereotypes.

Therefore, commemorative practices are a resource and a tool for the formation of a diverse, pluralistic and conflictogenic ideological and symbolic space of post-Soviet society [3], and in relation to a separate individual they act as a way of modern political representation. Political actors and social groups, updating them in the corresponding versions of the politics of memory, at the same time as ensuring historical continuity in society, it also saturates social and political life with conflictogenic factors and processes. As a result, a certain irrationalization of the

political process of post-Soviet society, simultaneously leading both to the dominance of the problems of symbolic politics in the public sphere, and to the marginalization of issues of its socio-economic and technological development.

Thereby, in post-Soviet society, the political process is a controversial and conflictogenic phenomenon in which various political actors use the tools of symbolic politics mainly to achieve their own political goals and objectives than to solve the urgent problems of its development.

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