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“Democratic Standards” by Charles Michel²

On March 15-17 the presidential elections were held in the Russian Federation, according to which the incumbent head of state Vladimir Putin received 87,28% of the votes. As soon as the Central Electoral Commission published the first data on the election results, in accordance with the generally accepted traditions of political and diplomatic etiquette, V. Putin began to receive congratulatory messages and phone calls from the leaders of some states and international organizations. At the same time, this process did not pass without a scandal. This should be expected in view of the extremely tense relations between Russia and the West against the background of the Ukrainian case. Already in the morning of March 15, 2024, the President of the European Council Charles Michel published a sarcastic post on the social network “X”, peculiarly “congratulating” Putin on his victory. *“I would like to congratulate Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin on his “convincing” victory in the sham presidential election in Russia, where there was no opposition, no freedom, no choice”, Michel wrote, explicitly emphasizing that there was no need to wait for the results of the vote, since Putin's victory was deliberately predetermined and rigged by his “authoritarian regime”.*

Thus, Charles Michel's emphatically sarcastic comment became a kind of indicator of the European establishment's attitude toward the process of reproducing political power in the RF, which, according to Moscow's Western opponents, is absolutely anti-democratic and without any legitimate basis.

Perhaps such an assessment could pretend to be objective, and sarcasm would be pardonable for a high European official, if we were talking about Europe's truly uncompromising demand to all, without exception, partners, and opponents to follow the requirements of democracy and freedom. The Old World, which considers itself the originator of democracy and the legislator of its basic principles and norms, would certainly have grounds for paternalistic revisionism and condemnation in the case of Russia, if it were to adhere to identical approaches to other “offending countries” of the foundations of the “democratic oikumene”.

However, as we can see, such objectivity is not always necessary for European officials.

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² The original article (in Russian) was submitted to the Editorial office on 24.03.2024.

On March 08, 2024, the same Mr. Michel, on the occasion of the early presidential elections in Azerbaijan held the day before, sent a congratulatory message, this time to the Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev, about which he did not fail to inform the public on his page in social network X. *“Congratulated Ilham Aliyev on his re-election as President of Azerbaijan”, Michel wrote, “and conveyed my best wishes for his new mandate. Discussed also EU-Azerbaijan relations and cooperation, including connectivity and energy”.*

As you can see from Michel's post, there's no note of sarcasm to speak of. In fact, the attitude toward Aliyev's victory is filled the sense of undisguised satisfaction and even joy. We are talking about Aliyev, whose family has been ruling Azerbaijan as its own monarchical fiefdom for 30 years, and he himself has been at the helm of power for 20 uninterrupted years and, according to the constitutional amendments, with the prospect of further life-long rule. We are talking about a politician who has been involved in dozens of corruption scandals related to European structures and financial-political circles, exposed again by the European media and law enforcement agencies. We are talking about the man who committed genocide against the Armenians of Artsakh, who expelled them from their thousand-year-old homeland by means of famine, terror and massacres, and who is now destroying their cultural and historical heritage in the land of their ancestors. We are talking about a dictator who, more than anyone else, has made unflattering and even insulting statements in public against the European community, declaring the democratic course and liberal values of European countries to be false and hypocritical.

As for the elections in particular, on the occasion of which Mr. Michel sent a congratulatory message to Aliyev, according to the assessment of the most authoritative European structures (EP, PACE, etc.) and international human rights organizations, they were held with gross violations of the rights and freedoms of citizens and in full compliance with the principles of classic dictatorships. Aliyev's regime banned pre-election rallies and meetings. All his “opponents”, without exception, were nominated as candidates by pro-government parties and circles. Criticism of the authorities in their assessment of the situation in the country was completely absent, as was the format of debates in the media sphere. Opposition politicians and journalists were deliberately arrested and sentenced to prison on trumped-up charges. Independent organizations and international structures were denied the right to monitor the elections in Azerbaijan. Massive ballot stuffing took place in polling stations across the country, and the vote counting process in the field and in the CEC was not without known violations. The authorities made full use of administrative resources and all known methods of pressure and intimidation of voters. As a result, Ilham Aliyev, according to the data announced by the CEC of Azerbaijan on March 11, 2024, received 92,12% of the votes, which is a clear reflection of the state of democracy in the country. In fact, contrary to its proclaimed

liberal values, Azerbaijan has been living in a strict accordance with its brutal Eastern monarchical traditions, where elections are nothing more than face-saving formalities for the eyes of “the civilized world”.

And, as it seems, for the civilized world in the person of Charles Michel, such formality is sufficient from the point of view of legitimizing partnership and friendly relations with Baku. The Latin proverb “*What is allowed to Jupiter is not allowed to the bull*” corresponds exactly to the bias and partiality of the European “promoters of democratic values”. But the absurdity of the situation lies in the fact that in this case the role of Jupiter is played by the Azerbaijani president, from whom his Russian colleague, cynically ridiculed by Mr. Michel, is far behind in absolutely all indicators of “*violations of democratic values and freedoms*”.

But Mr. Michel has “good reasons” for this. In his own congratulatory letter on Aliyev’s election, the head of the European Council inadvertently or deliberately (it makes no difference) revealed the official reason for his emphatically selective attitude to the criteria of democracy. “*Discussed ... the energy sector*” Mr. Michel wrote, thus making it clear that “Azerbaijani democracy” is measured by progressive and civilized Europe exclusively in barrels of oil and cubic meters of gas, as well as, *highly likely*, in other material benefits, which is mired in corruption, lawlessness and crimes against humanity.