CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS (GR) IN RUSSIAN POLITICAL SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problem of a GR concept comprehensive perception within the framework of Russian political science. Some researchers believe that GR is a modern replacement for the classic term “lobbyism” and is not new. Others call it a new direction in corporate management. Still others believe that GR is a new approach to political management. However, it cannot be denied that this area is gaining weight, evolving, and forming a research conceptual model. In this paper, an analysis and assessment of existing approaches to the definition of the GR concept by Russian and foreign political scientists are carried out. An author’s definition of GR was put forward based on an understanding of the main goal of interaction between business actors and public authorities. In particular, GR is understood as the activity of representatives of large business actors in building sustainable relations with government to achieve competitive advantages and create favorable conditions for their own economic activities.

Keywords: Government relations. Theory of interest groups. Business actors. Communication technologies. Economic competition.

CONCEPTUALIZAÇÃO DAS RELAÇÕES DE GOVERNO (GR) NA CIÊNCIA POLÍTICA DA RÚSSIA

CONCEPTUALIZACIÓN DE LAS RELACIONES GUBERNAMENTALES (RG) EN LA CIENCIA POLÍTICA RUSA

RESUMO

Este artigo discute o problema de uma percepção abrangente do conceito de GR dentro da estrutura da ciência política russa. Alguns pesquisadores acreditam que o GR é um substituto moderno para o termo clássico “lobismo” e não é novo. Outros chamam de uma nova direção na gestão corporativa. Outros ainda acreditam que GR é uma nova abordagem para a gestão política. Porém, não se pode negar que essa área está ganhando peso, evoluindo e formando um modelo conceitual de pesquisa. Neste artigo, uma análise e avaliação das abordagens existentes para a definição do conceito de GR por cientistas políticos russos e estrangeiros são realizadas. A definição de GR do autor foi apresentada com base na compreensão do objetivo principal da interação entre os atores empresariais e as autoridades públicas. Em particular, GR é entendido como a atividade de representantes de grandes empresários na construção de relações sustentáveis com o governo, a fim de obter vantagens competitivas e criar condições favoráveis para suas próprias atividades econômicas.


RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el problema de la percepción integral del concepto de GR en el marco de la ciencia política rusa. Algunos investigadores creen que GR es un reemplazo moderno del término clásico “cabildo” y no es nuevo. Otros creen que los GR son un nuevo enfoque de la gestión política. Mientras, no se puede negar que esta área está ganando peso, evolucionando y configurando un modelo conceptual de investigación. En este artículo, se lleva a cabo un análisis y evaluación de los enfoques existentes para la definición del concepto de GR por científicos políticos rusos y extranjeros. Se propuso una definición de GR por parte de un autor basada en la comprensión del objetivo principal de interacción entre los actores empresariales y las autoridades. En particular, los GR se entienden como la actividad de los representantes de los grandes actores empresariales en la construcción de relaciones sostenibles con el gobierno con el fin de lograr ventajas competitivas y crear condiciones favorables para sus propias actividades económicas.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the orientation of research on “Government Relations” has gained particular relevance among domestic political scientists because the evolution of public institutions and business structures, the democratization of state institutions, the rapid growth of information technology, social networks and innovative management methods have led to the development of communication technologies used in the space between business actors (and other non-state actors) and public authorities.

It cannot be denied that among all non-governmental public actors, business, especially large ones, plays a significant role voluntarily or involuntarily in the political process (including in the process of its interaction with authorities). In recent decades, large business actors have become recognized participants in not only micro, macroeconomic, but also political processes. The role of business actors in political practice “as an influential socio-political institution and a powerful political entity, which, in some cases, is comparable to the state and in some countries, they can surpass it in its power”. (MATVEENKOV, 2011).

These processes lead to an increase in the number and improvement of the quality of interactions between business actors and public authorities. Such interactions acquire the greatest significance for business actors in the face of an increase in the degree of state regulation of the economy. The state is forming a legal framework within which business actors interact with other participants in economic and political relations. In addition, the state exerts a managerial influence on business actors. Thus, the success of the activities of both business actors and the government itself depends on the organization of effective interaction with public authorities.

For this reason, Government Relations (abbreviated GR) has appeared and developed as a new direction in Russian political science. Determination of the place and role of this direction in domestic political science still causes difficulties. Some researchers call it a new direction in the framework of corporate management. Others believe that GR is a modern replacement for the classic term “lobbyism” and is not new. Still others believe that GR is a new political management approach that meets the requirements of the modern information society. Nevertheless, despite all the differences in understanding GR, it cannot be denied that this direction is gaining weight and is evolving and forming a research conceptual model. The GR study is increasingly being used to analyze and explain the processes taking place in the relationship of business actors with public authorities at all levels.

METHODS

This work is written from the point of view of the theory of interest groups, which explains the reasons for the implementation of GR-activities by business actors that all subjects of the socio-economic sphere are forced to act in a competitive environment. In other words, the presence of competing actors with their own interests serves as a motivation for business actors to interact with authorities.

It is also worth noting that, within the framework of the theory of interest groups, business structures carry out political activities for ideological reasons. The peculiarity of this view is that business actors (primarily in the person of large firms and transnational corporations) implement GR due to the rejection of the new state policy in the field of economics. For example, Keynesian state policy, and economic and political socialism in country politics or neoconservative economic theories promoted by parliamentarians have a negative impact on the functioning of economic actors. First of all, the consequences of such a policy affect the competitiveness of business actors. Thus, within the framework of the theory of interest groups, GR is perceived as a forced implementation of the interaction of business structures with state authorities to prevent unprofitable and undesirable political and economic changes for them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Currently, the orientation of research in the field of “Government Relations” has gained particular relevance among domestic political scientists. The study of the political environment for communications between various actors and state authorities and the features of interaction with the state, which is the main political institution of society, allows us to study the political structure of the state, establish the balance of political forces and determine the dynamics of the political system of society.

Besides the fact that now there is a need to give a clear definition of the GR concept, the problem of distinguishing “GR” from such related concepts as “lobbyism”, “public affairs” (PA) and “public relations” (PR) is identified in political science, inextricably with the understanding of the concept. It is worth noting that these concepts are
part of the general sphere of social communication, which is aimed at obtaining benefits for social actors through various participation options in social and political activities.

To begin with, let us return to the fact that in the modern scientific community there is no single view on the definition of the GR concept, which leads to a lack of a common understanding of this sphere of communications. Therefore, at present, there are many definitions of GR that have ambiguous content in Russian political science. In some cases, GR is “equated” to “lobbyism” and is interpreted very narrowly. In other cases, GR refers to everything related to the sphere of interaction between civil society and the state, thereby interpreting the GR concept very broadly.

As mentioned earlier, the GR concept came to Russian political science from Western political practice. Western political scientists U. Agi, G. Cameron, F. Olt, D. Wilcox define GR as “the activity of building relationships between various public groups (business structures, professional unions, volunteer organizations, etc.) and government, which includes collection and processing of information on the activities of the government, preparation and dissemination of information on the positions of the represented groups, impact on the processes of political and administrative decision-making (lobbyism)” [AGI, 2004]. A similar definition of GR was given by another Western scientist K. Mack: “GR is the application of communication technologies by individuals or social institutions to influence government decisions at the local, regional, national or international levels or their combinations” [Mack, 1997]. Thus, in the Western political science interpretation, GR is understood as the process of creating communications between public groups and the state. It is also important to note that W. Agi, G. Cameron, F. Olt, D. Wilcox in their own definition reveal in detail the essence of GR through various stages of the communication activities of public groups and organizations. Thus, they focus on the fact that the initiative in creating these communications belongs to representatives of public groups.

In our opinion, the definition of GR by foreign scientists is not without flaws. Firstly, it seems very controversial to say that one of the parties to GR is the broad concept of “social groups”, because they can be understood as absolutely any groups of people. It is worth noting that K. Mack generally defines GR as the interaction of individuals and social institutions with the state. If we rely on the definition of Agi, G. Cameron, F. Olt, D. Wilcox, and K. Mack then GR is the interaction between any representative of society and the state. In our opinion, this approach to definition is broad and needs to be supplemented and clarified; these interactions must be specified in the spirit which actors build relations with the state, and also reflect the purpose of such interaction due to the fact that different organizations (commercial, non-profit, political) have different goals for interacting with the state.

In turn, domestic politicians and political scientists also give their own interpretation of GR. One of the most frequently quoted definitions of GR is that given by P.A. Tolstoy: “GR are the activities of specially authorized employees of large commercial structures (GR-managers) to conduct the work of a company in the political environment” (http://lobbying.ru/dictionary_word.php?id=6). Analyzing this definition, one can see that here the essence of GR is revealed as the activity of business actors in the political sphere with an emphasis on “special employees”. In this case, GR is interpreted as a highly specialized professional activity of people to ensure the interaction of business with the government. In our opinion, this definition does not fully clarify the understanding of the GR phenomenon, since there is no explanation of what kind of relationship is taking place.

As L.V. Smorgunov suggests in his writings: “GR is a special organization for the interaction of non-state structures (civil society and business associations) with the state to influence the government in order to coordinate and make effective decisions” [SMORGUNOV, TIMOFEEVA, 2012]. GR in this case is understood as the interaction of a wide range of civil society actors with the state, the result of which is favorable decisions for both parties.

T.A. Kulakova in her works clarifies the GR concept and defines it as “one of the areas of communicative management, the purpose of which is to coordinate the interests of organizations with the interests of public authorities at various levels to reduce risks and ensure sustainable development” (http://www.politex.info/content/view/139/30). It is worth highlighting that in this definition T.A. Kulakova regards GR as part of the communication management of an organization. In comparison with the previous ones, the definition reveals GR not as the interaction between commercial structures with the state, but as the management of communication channels. In our opinion, the definition of T.A. Kulakova is a fundamentally different approach to the consideration of GR. Government Relations means originally “ties and relations with the state, or government”, but in this case the category of management is included in the definition.

In the writings of V.V. Sergeyev, GR is defined as “a special form of information and communication system in the
political sphere, representing a set of information flows that are constantly formed around targeted interactions between business and government representatives and are capable of their stable reproduction due to the activities of specially created organizational structures" (SERGEEV, 2013). In this definition, V.V. Sergeev presents GR as a form of information communication system formed by the interaction of business actors with public authorities. It is important to note that, unlike in the previous definitions, GR is treated here as a process of constant interaction reproduced by special structures. It is not always possible to clearly identify such structures as part of business actors. In addition, V.V. Sergeev notes that this communication tends to stable reproduction. In our opinion, V.V. Sergeev points to the institutional nature of GR.

Such domestic political scientists as A.N. Chumikov and M.P. Bocharov consider GR as "a conscious organization of communications, the establishment of effective communications with public authorities" (CHUMIKOV, BOCHAROV, 2009). In our opinion, the drawback in this definition is that it was not indicated who has entered into interaction with public authorities. We can conclude that according to A.N. Chumikov and M.P. Bocharov, any entity interacting with the government implements GR. Such a definition may be subject to the same criticism of ours, similar to the definition of Western political scientists in the person of W. Agi, G. Cameron, F. Olt, D. Wilcox, who also claimed that social groups entered into relations with the government. In our opinion, there is a risk of defining GR too broadly with the approach claiming that GR is the communication of any (economic, political and other) actors with the state. This approach only introduces more confusion. Moreover, the goals of relations between these entities and the state may be different. Therefore, this definition of GR requires clarification that the interaction is carried out by business actors with public authorities.

It is worth mentioning the definition of GR given by Yu. M. Mikhailov: “GR is a situation in which relations with the state are considered as PR of state structures” (MIKHAILOV, 2007). The peculiarity of this view, in our opinion, is, firstly, in the statement that, GR is part of PR. Secondly, relations with the state are considered by Yu. M. Mikhailov as an interaction, in which the initiative belongs to the state. However, as noted above, the initiative in GR belongs primarily to commercial structures, business actors, individuals, and groups of people. This is a feature of GR itself.

In the research by V.V. Gibanov, I.V. Sidorskaya, I.A. Bykov, GR is defined as part of lobbying: “GR is the relationship of social entities with state authorities, where GR specialists are people who build a bridge between government and business, so that lobbyists can freely cross this bridge to resolve their issues with power” [State PR and GR in Russia and Belarus, 2015]. It is worth noting that in this case, GR is considered as an activity carried out within the framework of lobbying. In other words, these authors argue that GR is part of lobbying, which is in doubt. However, in the definition of W. Agi, G. Cameron, F. Olt, and D. Wilcox, it is indicated that lobbying is only one of GR technologies. In this case, a contradiction arises in understanding the relationship between GR and lobbying. This problem requires further consideration.

**SUMMARY**

Thus, there are many approaches in political science to the definition of GR. In general and in all definitions, GR is firstly an interaction, relationship or communication activity. Secondly, this interaction is carried out between public groups and individuals (including business actors) with public authorities. Thirdly, GR is carried out by specially authorized people. Fourth, the initiative in this interaction belongs to the representatives of society. Fifthly, the goal of GR is defined as achieving economic competitiveness through political means.

**CONCLUSIONS**

However, as we noted above, the definition of GR requires concretization and refinement. Firstly, it should be noted that Government Relations originally means relations with the government; therefore the use of management, control or PR in the definition of concepts is considered inappropriate due to the narrow meaning of the terms in this context. Secondly, like any definitions that reflect the relations of some entities with others, GR requires specifying the parties to these relationships.

Since the 1970s in the USA, the relationships of large business actors were considered within the framework of the American term “business-government relations”. Thirdly, in our opinion, the essence of GR is to build long-term and stable relations of business actors with public authorities using various technologies. Thus, we interpret GR narrowly and understand it as the activity of representatives of large business actors in building sustainable relations with government in order to achieve competitive advantages and create favourable conditions for their own economic activities. GR-activities include the collection and processing of information on the activities of...
public authorities, the preparation and dissemination of information on the positions of business actors, the
impact of various technologies and methods on the processes of political and administrative decision-making
by the authorities.

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