Factors of formation and recruitment of political elites of Great Britain in post-Imperial period

Utkina Maria (Moscow, MGIMO-University)

In recent decades, the United Kingdom has experienced widespread political transformation - at the beginning of the decade, the United Kingdom participated in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, in 2008 the country experienced a serious economic downturn amid the global financial crisis, and in 2014 Scotland held a referendum on its independence. However, the most striking political event of the XXI century, both for the UK and the European Union was the referendum of 2016 on the UK's withdrawal from the EU, following which Britain left the EU without any agreement.

The study of the political elite and its role in the context of significant political and socio-economic changes is of particular interest to researchers of political elites and those responsible for implementing foreign policy strategy. The political elite plays a key role in the governance processes of the state and in determining the strategy for further development of society. Understanding and studying recruitment and rotation of political elites, as well as their influence on political processes is important for the development of Russian-British relations.

Theoretical and methodological basis of the study is the elite-centric approach and neo-institutionalism, in particular, historical institutionalism.

The process of formation of the British political elite in the specified period will be presented on the example of disclosure of the main recruitment mechanisms, as well as the two dominant recruitment channels - the education system and political parties.

The specific recruitment mechanism of the political elite, characteristic for Great Britain, is the institution of dynasty and the title system based on it, although this phenomenon is becoming less and less typical for democratic societies. Throughout the 20th century, the role of the aristocracy was diminishing, but nowadays the British elite still retains a significant influence,

which is explained by the custom of primogeniture and the emergence of the peership for life.

In the 21st century, the British nobility adjusted the mechanisms of production and nomination of the political elite. The British Parliament has become frequently criticized by the masses - despite the democratization of the socio-political sphere, the Parliament today remains elitist. Part of British society has actively promoted inclusion, involvement and entry of women and BAME representatives into the political leadership of the state. Thus, the role of the mechanism for recruiting political elites in the UK, based on the principle of political inclusiveness, has increased.

Research in the historical retrospective of the British educational system plays an extremely important role in understanding the elite formation. The level of education of politicians in the UK is significantly different from the level of education of the population they represent. The British system of private schools has brought a disproportionate number of its graduates to key decision-making groups in the country. Educational institutions in Great Britain became a channel for recruiting elites and reproducing social hierarchies.

The institutional design of the British political system has contributed to the transformation of political parties into an institution of electoral recruitment of ruling elites. The essence of the Westminster model is that a party that gains a relative majority in elections forms a government, and its leader usually becomes Prime minister. The losing party forms the shadow cabinet, whose members appear as opponents to the incumbent ministers in parliamentary debates. Consequently, a significant part of the British political elite passes through the 'party selectorate'.

Thus, the author concludes that the specificity of the British elite is characterized by a combination of the principles of dynasty and inclusiveness, as well as the party and educational selectorates.