

MEDVEDEV'S ELECTORAL IDEOLOGY – CONSERVATIVE PRAGMATISM

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Since 2004, the Russian presidential elections have been a plebiscite, demonstrating public trust in the acting government; there are no grounds to believe that things will be different in 2012. The first stage of the upcoming campaign will require solving which candidate will represent the system of power and hold public confidence – Medvedev or Putin. Only after this stage can decisions be made regarding the appropriate message to deliver to the public for the 2012 campaign.

The first stage of the campaign has obviously commenced, signalled by public statements issued by both leaders. The competitiveness that has arisen has indeed been confirmed by the President in a recent interview with Danish journalists. His statements explaining how electoral competition between colleagues is absolutely natural in a democracy was viewed as a joke by the Russian media.

Simultaneous participation in the election by the acting president and the ex-president would surely contradict the spirit of the established system, something that Medvedev knows all too well. It appears contradictory indeed that, while maintaining he will discuss the matter with the Prime Minister and reach a decision cordially, he nevertheless seems geared to participate in the upcoming elections.

Such determination is surely a factor for success in itself. It should also be noted that the acting president has the grounds to expect a successive legislature. In my opinion, the basis for this lies mainly in the progress in his relations with the West, which has long been desired by the Russian ruling elite. Obama's comments on the Russian President demonstrate that **the West cast their vote for Medvedev**. Several parts of the Russian establishment agree with this trend and support Medvedev as well.

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The present shape of Medvedev's agenda on foreign affairs can be viewed as part of the 2012 presidential campaign. To be more exact, it is a part of the initial campaign that is dictated by the ruling elite. This is not to suggest that ratings and public trust are not important. Currently, public ratings are a significant factor that work to balance the elite; and as 2012 approaches, they will surely be brought into the foreground.

This transition, from the consensus of the elite around Medvedev to a mass consensus presents certain problems, not only because the expectations of the elite and the masses are different, but because sometimes they are directly opposed. In my

opinion, the focal points for contradiction lie in the way mass expectations are structured around the acting President.

Russians still view Medvedev as a dissident on the throne and as a leader who is not content with the quality of the Russian system, which includes its economic structure, human resources, quality of the state machine, and level of political culture. It is this dissatisfaction and openness to change that separates him from Putin and encourages many active social groups to openly support him.

However, he is not likely to take on this role again in 2012. As the leader of the state with four year's experience, it is more likely that Medvedev will seek to employ the state's resources to address concrete issues rather than meddle in more idealistic pursuits. Moreover, he will have to present not just an alternative to Putin but demonstrate a lack of alternatives available in the system, a strategy which has a long a successful history for those in power.

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In other words, I assume that **in the upcoming election, we are more likely to see the emergence of a conservative Medvedev rather than a reformist one.** But how is this possible when his main message to Russia has been one of modernization? In all likelihood, Medvedev will have to convince the country that a desirable pace and direction of modernization has already been established.

This is not a trivial task, especially given the fact that today very few people actually believe it.

The projects that represent the President's modernization plan, such as the creation of an inno-

vation valley in Skolkovo or the Moscow International Financial Centre, must appear successful in the eyes of the public or at least promising in the long run. Moreover, their success should also be seen as vital to the country as a whole.

It is notable that the second aspect of the problem is even more difficult than the first. It is important to demonstrate that ‘the multispeed Russia,’ an image that is promoted by the aforementioned projects, is not only an integral state, but also an integral community. It is necessary to demonstrate that privileged sites of modernization, whether territorial, corporate, or industrial, will drive development of the nation’s economic and social spheres as a whole.

When considering the complexity of this task, it seems likely that political technologies will prevail over politics at the 2012 elections. In other words, the election agenda will be a tangent of Medvedev’s own agenda for securing a second term.

Most likely, a clear contrast will be apparent.

If his campaign follows a motto of **conservative pragmatism** that is based on the status quo and on playing with the electoral results, **Medvedev’s second term has the potential to turn out to be entirely different – it could be reformist and value oriented.**

This sounds strange given that usually the opposite occurs, that is to say ‘idealism’ at the elections and ‘pragmatism’ only after the post is gained. In any event, it is likely that the president has a certain set of reforms planned for his second, and final, term. ■

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THE AGENDA WILL BE DICTATED BY HISTORY



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The election campaign of 2011-2012 will invariably adopt a particular agenda, and center around a few key topics. At the moment, judging by the present demeanor of all the potential candidates, it is difficult to make an accurate forecast of the topics that will either splinter or serve as some point of agreement for the candidates.

As the recent debates on the Victory Day issue revealed, there exists such a crucial problem throughout the nation with historical self-identity, common attitudes to the country’s history, and most importantly common attitudes to the Soviet era.

It is notable that there is such a strong reaction when the leaders of the country speak about Stalin and his role in World War II. Hardly any of the current presidential candidates will be able to ignore this topic during the run-up to the election.

The reaction of politicians to the issue of modernization as

stated by the President have also varied considerably. There is a particular ideological consensus among the political class that the country should diversify certain elements of the economy and generally strive to overcome its relative backwardness.

While there may exist a wide variety of opinions on what modernization is and how it should be carried out, **there is no outright opposition to modernization in the country in general, at least among the elite of the political class.**

The apparent shift to the left in the face of the economic crisis will most likely be compensated by the growing demand to limit state involvement in the economy (a sentiment that is growing more and more popular not only in Russia, but also in the West).

Owing to this trend, it seems likely that a more conservative voice will play a prominent role in the 2012 election campaign. ■