

# THE COUNTRY ALREADY KNOWS THE AGENDA OF THE FUTURE PRESIDENCY

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The questions put forth by The Russian Journal about the 2012 agenda would be best divided into two parts.

Let's start with the electoral campaign in the USA. At the present moment, there is a mid-term campaign for the House of Representatives elections (in November 2010) happening, not to be confused with the presidential campaign in 2012. The peculiarity of the current situation is that Barack Obama has managed to impose his agenda both on foreign and domestic policy. The Bush-like republicans remain hostile to this agenda, but these do not make up the entire Republican Party.

**I do not think that the vast majority of the American establishment will want to radically change the foreign policy being**

pursued by Obama, no matter who becomes the President. The disappointment and shame left over from the foreign policy led by George Bush are today widespread in both the Democratic and the Republican Parties.

On the other hand, **Obama has sharply polarised the country in the domestic policy sphere.** The primary cause of this polarisation was the process of reforming the health care system. This was a brave and even a daring act. In the short term, we will not know whether or not his efforts end up being successful. In any case, the Democrats are likely to lose voters after the mid-term elections. Generally, we could say that Obama has made the Republican Party even more right-wing than it was previously. This is exactly what many Congressional candidates of the Republican Party are staking their campaigns on.

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As for the situation in Russia, the 2012 campaign has not started yet and will not start until it is determined (and made known to the world) just who the candidates are going to be? The answer to this question will be known by the end of 2011. In the meantime, the basis for the campaign is being prepared.

First of all, the country's agenda has been focused on modernisation for the past two years. This

other matters, such as the economic crisis, as well as the war in Georgia. In fact, he only returned to this policy in September 2009.

Whatever ends up happening, **any of the candidates in the 2012 election will have to consider an agenda that includes modernisation as the key point.** Essentially, the country already knows the agenda of the next presidency.

The campaign has already begun in a sense. At least it is true for the 2011 campaign for elections to Russia's State Duma. Let's examine the results of the last regional elections. The United Russia Party received on average more than 50 percent of the vote (the average of the previous election in 2007-2009 was about 60 percent and even more). If we read the statements of ideologists and party leaders, who aim to 'return to the past indicators', we will see that the campaign has essentially already begun. In Russia, the parliamentary elections are considered to be a sort of primary in advance of the presidential election.

The problem is that the presidential elections here are virtually always plebiscites, and the president is always 'the president of all Russians', like a super-party figure. Parliamentary party-based campaigns according to the proportional system should be inherently competitive, but after 2007, they have

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was President Medvedev's slogan during the election. Other circumstances made him postpone his policy as he had to deal with

also practically turned into a plebiscite in terms of their results. With the present-day state of the development of polit-

ical pluralism, this situation is risky since the rest of the parties are teetering on the edge of the vote threshold. Even if they manage to get into the legislative body (regardless of whether it is a federal or regional one), they cannot achieve significant influence for all of them. This means that promising political figures are losing their incentive to move to opposition parties.

It has been repeatedly stated (even by the country's president) that opposition parties are not able to define an alternative vision of the country's development. This is a fair statement. To define a vision, a party should have serious people who think broadly. The Communists have them thanks to the party's inertia, but they tend to be in their seventies, as a rule. The United Russia Party has some as well, but usually these people had already become successful politicians before they joined the party. It is fair to say that the fewer opportunities a party has, the fewer new serious people that it manages to attract to its ranks. As a result, it is very difficult to predict the agenda of the parliamentary campaign. We cannot foresee what the opposition will stand for and if it will even be able to formulate an agenda.

As for the other issues on the Russian agenda, environmental issues are not likely to play a significant role. People are starting to think about ecology as a priority problem in two instances. This first is an issue when they live next to a polluting plant (but this is just a minority), or when the problems of survival, putting food on the table and the bare necessities are resolved and a person starts to think about their quality of life. Russia has not reached the stage where the environment can possibly become a priority issue for the popular majority. The same thing holds true for the state-owned corporations. In fact, the popular majority does not care if there are any corporations, although there is a significant 'but' in this case. Namely, the population of Russia still assumes that state-owned industry (especially the large ones) is a good thing, and that private ownership in this field is detrimental.

**Thus, the priority topic of 2012 is modernisation.** This is not only due to the fact that it is in the election programme, but also to the way that it is expressed. The best way ahead for Russia is to understand the pattern of modernisation described by President Dmitry Medvedev in his article published in September 2009, and in his address to the Federal Assembly. In these two instances, he stated that **modernisation should be democratic and that it should result in a political regime** where political parties replace each other in forming the government authorities and that this constitutes political reform. It will be critically important whether or not the platform of any of the other presidential candidates will be compatible with President Medvedev's idea. ■

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## MODERNIZATION OR STABILIZATION?



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**T**oday, we can say that a **campaign by the State Duma, not by the President, has begun in Russia.** It seems that only the development of the Skolkovo project is aimed at the coming elections.

As for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, his activities concern mostly United Russia. It is my opinion that the party will face hardships unless their agenda is changed. It currently focuses on two questions. The first is a kind of plebiscite: are you for the power or against it? The second is fraught with divisions: are you for Medvedev and modernization or for Putin and stabilization?

Dmitry Medvedev appeared in the 2008 elections with a slogan of modernization, and while some aspects of it will surely be altered, the slogan itself will be kept until 2012. But today we should be talking less about economic modernization and more about institutional modernization. For example, it is crucial and necessary to effect a modernization of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the court system.

Additionally, in 2008 Medvedev criticized the fact that such institutions have in essence become state corporations. Indeed, the current system is not an extremely efficient tool for allowing state involvement in the

economy. However, it is very likely that there will not be any discussion of the state removing itself from the field in 2011-2012. It is more likely that additional tools will be suggested to help carry out the development of state policy. Regarding the overall political agenda, it is clear that Dmitry Medvedev needs civil society much more than any of his predecessors do.

It would be ideal if environmental issues were included in the agendas of the upcoming election campaign. Unfortunately, this is very unlikely. Currently, this topic can only be introduced through one channel, and that is through the health care program.

As we all know, the next American Presidential election is going to take place in the same year as the Russian election. There is a good chance that America will continue shifting towards the political left; however, the extent of this shift will depend on who emerges as the opposition candidate. Meanwhile, both Presidents in Russia and in the USA will continue to play off one another. This means that each will base his activities on criticizing the other administration's foreign policy, a tactic that has now become most apparent in America. ■