

# DMITRY MEDVEDEV AND THE NEW REALPOLITIK-2012

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There is a new uprising of the masses happening in the world. At the same time, the winter of the Maghreb revolutions has insensibly evolved into the spring of Middle East interventions. The format of globalisation is changing quickly and unpredictably. Is there really a crisis of the Russian state system within the new global context?

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For almost the two decades that have passed since Vladimir Putin first became the country's president, the accusation refrain — a fundamental, serious, philosophic one — for Russian politics was that it is obsessed with the Realpolitik spirit, the spirit of agenda-driven politics that is alien of values.

But recently in the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, in an article by the famous journalist Sonja Zekri — who harshly criticizes Russia's policies — she finally welcomes Dmitry Medvedev by saying that, at last, **Russia has started towards the real politics!** This

was named a 'project of prudence'. And what Russia is receiving approval for in this case is Realpolitik. Finally the Russians have dismissed all doubts and Hamlet-type hesitation and have joined the West in the Libyan issue. Medvedev is unexpectedly the one who is the real politician, and Putin is a Chekhov-style character wearing glasses.

**Something is fundamentally changing in the world.** There was practically no notice of the fact that Saudi troops entered Bahrain in the shadow of all the current changes. It was high time for the Saudis to smash the Shias in Bahrain and that was such a propitious moment. The global public is not able to monitor two important processes at the same time. It focuses just on one scene being abstracted from everything else. **Those who were trying to take fancy by their 'Europeanism' suddenly make fools of themselves.** While starting to come to the policy of values and humanity, they now find out that it is no longer required and that it is being neglected. Now we are being criticised for our lack of realism. The words of Putin, who seemed not to be politically correct to many people in Russia, seem reprehensively idealistic in the West. Practically nobody argues with him, as nobody would ever argue with a humane scholar who is expounding big military manoeuvres. This makes one wonder **what the real politics of today consists of anyways.**

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Addressing those in Russia who used to like to advance picturesque geopolitical theses not so long ago, we will again find idealists who are nostalgically seeing off **the outgoing world of the old geopolitics.** In that world, the policy of nations was full of far-reaching aims, the intentions of great grandmasters were revealed in it, and the continents were

preparing for attacks and counter-attacks. Ultimately, the world of geopolitical Victor Hugo is romantic but archaic. Realistically speaking, **we are witnessing the end of geopolitics,** even in the most pragmatic sense of the word. What exactly were the peoples of the Middle East rebelling against? They **rebelled against rather sensible and geopolitically functional anti-Muslim regimes.** These are regimes that were being built up for a long time, and at a high price, by their politicians, who were supported by the West. Prior to that, they were supported by the Soviet Union as well.

**There was only one purpose of all those tyrannies, from Tunisia through Bahrain to Yemen — to be a stronghold against Islamism,** just as there was only one purpose of the Warsaw Pact countries, which were, in their time, to serve as a stronghold against the West and against any potential revival of a united Germany within Central Europe. In 1989, the Soviet geopolitical stronghold collapsed. In 2011, another geopolitical bastion is collapsing — the one in the Middle East. Although it did manage to halt the spread of Islamism, there is no need for it anymore.

Such expensive and mighty geopolitical tanks as Mubarak's Egypt, Gaddafi's Libya, Tunisia and Bahrain, and soon those that shall follow, are gradually ceasing to exist. **The peoples of those countries do not want to serve their geopolitical functions anymore.**

**On the other hand, new Realpolitik is beginning to reveal itself, while it has taken an absurd and unsystematic shape so far.** Nicolas Sarkozy has no idea of what should be built in Libya, just as Brezhnev previously did not think deeply about what would become of Czechoslovakia when he decided to send troops into the country in 1968. Sarkozy is not in the least interested in distant

geopolitical horizons. He is looking to solve the short-term tasks of consolidation within France and in Europe, and Gaddafi happened to come in handy as a political instrument. But will Russia manage to solve its problems too?

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**What is realistic within the context of Russian politics? It certainly does include presidential elections.** But what should be considered as *Realpolitik* on the eve of 2012? Many think that it is Putin's or Medvedev's will – their manoeuvres, their possible consolidation, and the other one leaving or else coming back. It is not so. Or rather it may be that all these things are important, but they are nevertheless not the agenda for *Realpolitik-2012*. The topic of the 2012 elections will inevitably consist of the nature and provision of the **mass interest**, which Putin – voluntarily or involuntarily – has made the basis of the state policy.

Seeing no evident political forces with clear representation in our arena, analysts are becoming used to ignoring the aspect of the greater public interest in politics. They have also become absorbed in discussing elite models and intrigues. This is all the more so since Russian journalism, which has basically become the inner correspondence of elite groups, is eager to talk about popular protest and is forever waiting for a 'new revolution' to come. Indeed, there are no mass coalitions of citizens represented in politics, as they merely do not exist. But their interests are nevertheless represented.

**Vladimir Putin and, ensuring that continuity is maintained along the same path, Dmitry Medvedev, built the legitimacy of power on a certain political concept. It is the philosophy of acceptance and of satisfying mass interests preliminarily and in a 'fair' way.** This concept was named the policy of stability, and its result is 'Putin's majority', which is partly a political thesis and partly an administrative-managerial division. Due to this, not to their political pressure, the masses and their interests have become a significant basis for executive power programming.

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The foundation of this programming is not constitutional law, but rather the state budget. When considering the state budget, we will always find a subject comprised of three elements. The first element is the provision for the interests of the particular socio-demographic groups (as they are perceived by the ruling class). The second one is what the ruling class has their eye on in order to steal, setting it aside in convenient places. And finally the third one is something for the development of regions, economic infrastructure, and hospitality expenditures, which is indispensable for a sovereign country and a United Nations member. Thus, our **budget reflects the real concept, but it has nothing to do with the country's development concept. This is a concept of providing for mass group interests.** And this is the utmost realism that we have for today.

Alexey Kudrin, who is considered to be a fighter against 'social extravagance', has never radically opposed this philosophy. He corrected its shortcomings and butted heads with groups of reliant on budget allocations. Just like the case with Putin, he is frightened of the ruling masses, while the masses are frightened by the intense greed and cruelty of their elites, thus balancing both of these elements through his own authority. But today, in the context of the proclaimed end of the 'old system', relegating it to a backward archaic one that should be subject to modernisation, we once again face the question of providing for the interests of the masses.

Yesterday these mass interests were **provided for by Putin, then by the Medvedev-Putin tandem according to the budget, which is censured by Kudrin, and the entire real structure of the state.**

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It is a bit similar to the **pre-crisis model of the American economy with its 'mortgage majority' being widened – millions of mortgage and security holders – and derivatives linked to the mortgage market.** This era coincided in terms of time with

the years of the rise of the 'Putin majority' in Russia. Even then, long before the crisis began, these securities were considered to be bad and invalid credit instruments. Homeowners had virtually no chance to pay them off, but the economy needed more and more cheap credit of this kind and so the bubble kept growing bigger and bigger at a rapid pace until it just burst.

**At the same time, the social bubble of the 'Putin majority' was also getting bigger in Russia. The policy of satisfying the mass interests whetted appetites and also could not be stopped.** This expansion included not only payments for social obligations and pension adjustments but also the Munich speech, consumer loans for urban residents, and football and sport patriotism with its unstable insignias and mythology. All of that, taken together, made an impression of a Russia that was on the rise and mighty, as it used to be in America under the presidency of George W. Bush.

The houses of American homeowners are well made and solid, but the securities involved were considered to be 'low quality' long before the collapse of 2007-8. In comparison, Russian society is also a kind of well-made and arranged infrastructure, but it faces high risks. The former political and economic regime, the regime of stability and Putin's majority, is now becoming 'low quality' from a budgetary perspective.

The crisis of such systems is not that everybody stops paying off their mortgages at the same time or goes 'to the Kremlin', as was dreamt by the radicals of the non-systemic opposition. Just the fact that the *rate of expansion is slowing down* was enough to cause a collapse. The triumphal growth of this mass had barely ended when the crisis began. It happened in America and there exists a real threat that this could happen in Russia now, though in quite a different way. Fortunately for us, we did not acquire mass mortgages. The Russian bubble was swollen with budget pay-offs and their political 'derivatives' so to speak. But inside the bubble, there are dozens of millions of budget-dependent citizens, along with their property and security, and their own interests.

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For today, the key question of Realpolitik inside Russia is **who, in terms of politics, will provide and 'reinsure' the real investments of its millions of citizens into its state system?** This is not a matter of the personal political future of Medvedev or Putin. This is a matter of the future of their voters, and not in a theoretical sense. Will the new poli-

cy of Medvedev be able to provide for their interests?

Putin is still closely related to the current regime. Putin can be seen as a kind of Fannie Mae for the Russian state. As he is inside the majority, which has become unreliable, he can no longer protect it even with all the means of the country's financial infrastructure. He, just as every citizen of Russia, must be convinced that the

new system offers stability.

**This question should be addressed to Medvedev, not to Putin. Will the president put forward a concept to provide for the mass interests (including those of Putin himself as a citizen of Russia) or will he fail to do so?** Here lies the axis for the agenda of future elections, as well as their main element of intrigue. ■

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## THE SNARE OF HABERMAS

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**I**f we speak the truth, people will believe us less and less' — such is the paradox faced nowadays by the ruling establishment in authoritarian countries attempting to implement reforms. Evidently, this paradox has the following structure: by 'tightening the bolts' slowly, a regime loses credibility.

Then, if it begins to loosen the grip, i.e. ventures to publish materials about abuses and crimes inside the system, hoping that the society perceives it as a friendly step, the expectations of the ruling bureaucracy, as a rule, are not fulfilled. The general reader, seeing 'purging' publications, allowed by the system, about corruption inside the very system, totally forgets that just yesterday such publications were prohibited. **When a bureaucracy tries to turn into 'a bureaucracy with a human face,' it gets a juicy spit in this very face from society.**

Actually, we have witnessed this in looking at the failure of Putin's megaproject named 'gradually stepping behind Medvedev's back.' Vladimir Putin probably thinks: 'Well, I have gone! I have agreed to change the style, I am not against new freedoms. I do it voluntarily!' But in response he gets pictures of 'Putin's palace,' Gunvor accounts, lists with the names of those who are prohibited to enter the Euro-zone, where he is number one, flows of publications clearly showing that all his

'friends' are thieves and the new rich, sunk in vice. What has happened to Ushakov, who has just been dismissed from the post of FSB deputy director, is particularly smashing. It is clear that, without 'the monarch's will' to ensure the freedom of the press, the story about the general's 60 years anniversary celebration, which turned into a full-swing festivity in a Rublevka restaurant and cost 1 million dollars, would not be read in the *LifeNews* in every commuter train, it would be available only in special memoirs by Vladimir Pribylovsky published in London.

But the general reader, even if he understands about the struggle on top, does not believe for a second that here it is the case of the 'good functional bureaucrats' punishing a 'bad, immoral apparatchik.' The reader exclaims: 'You are all tarred with the same brush! Look at how your generals go berserk with money!' Actually, the history has shown that in such cases the 'good apparatchiks' fail to keep such a situation under control. The loss of credibility hits them with crushing mass riots.