

WHERE IS MEDVEDEV'S AGENDA?



LEONID RADZIKHOVSKY is a member of the Moscow Writers' Union, the Chairman of the Supervisory Council of the Political and Economical Communications Agency, and a laureate of the Golden Pen of Russia Award.

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In the modern world, politics is meant to avoid any possibilities and need for armed rebellions. That is what numerous democratic procedures have been specifically designed for.

It is hard to say if the mechanisms of democratic change of power are at work in present-day Russia. Words stated by the state leaders to the effect that they will decide on their own, without the people's participation, who will become the country's next president, suggest that such forces are not at work. So now the question on the political programme of the next president could be only of academic interest. Only when it is decided who is going to be the next president of Russia will it be clear what the agenda in the country will be for the next few years.

So far, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has not shown any signs with respect to his own political programme. All his words are a part of the 'common sense' possessed by virtually any Russian citizen. For example, Dmitry Medvedev is against bribery but we can hardly find a person today who is in favour of corruption. That is why is it virtually impossible for us to delineate any special agenda for Dmitry Medvedev to date.

Nevertheless, it does not matter in the case that there is no loyalty crisis in sight, all the more so since, **unlike the Arabic countries, Russian society is absolutely loyal to state authorities and is not prepared to oppose it.** The latest comic example to demonstrate this was when the symbol of the Olympic games was being voted on. No sooner had Putin said that he was for the Leopard that the Leopard reached the top of the list of potential mascots. This example shows the true attitude of Russian society to the authorities, more clearly than any signs of a drop in ratings for the ruling tandem.

Russian society still sticks to the so-called political contract, the content of which is pretty straightforward (i.e. while I am eating, I am deaf and dumb, as the Russian proverb goes). While the government authorities are busy feeding the population, the population tends to be in agreeance with the state authorities. However, if these authorities were to stop feeding the population, it would be most interesting to see what would happen. All the more so since, now, society no longer has any rapture in regard to Vladimir Putin. The love is gone, apathy and habitude remain, and habitude is a substitute for happiness, just as Pushkin once wrote. ■

NEW MIDDLE CLASS AGENDA



ANDREW KUCHINS is a leading expert in the external policies and security of Russia, and is the director of the Russia and Eurasia program of the Washington Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

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As the middle class continues to grow in Russia, and hopefully sooner rather than later it will become a majority of the population, **the middle class' demands and desires will have to be increasingly reflected in the policies undertaken by the Russian government, otherwise that government will lose support and be voted out of office.** This is the underlying notion of the theory of modernization. I do not doubt for a second that Russia, like any other sufficiently developed country, will successfully pass this stage of its evolution. Today, Russian society feels the urge for transformation. I would single out more secure guarantees of social well-being, property rights, and legal compliance as the most desired points of this transformation.

Vladimir Putin's 1999 Millennial statement was a brilliant political document. I teach a graduate course on Russian Politics and Foreign Policy at Johns Hopkins SAIS, and our class read it this week. This document captured perfectly the mood of the people in Russia — their desire

for no more revolutions, stability, predictability, and more prosperity. And for the most part, the majority of Russians have experienced these things over the past decade or so, and that is why Putin's popularity ratings whether as president or prime minister have been consistently so high.

But the **Russia of 2011 is not the same place as 1999. While everybody in any country desires stability and predictability, it is no longer a burning priority** in people's minds today as it was in the late 1990s when the Soviet and the Russian state literally went bankrupt twice. Increasingly, I think, the Russian people will want more out of their leaders and government, like the kinds of things that make government institutions more effective in addressing the social, legal, health, and other growing demands of a more prosperous citizenry. The successful Russian presidential candidate in 2012, I think, will need to cast his or her program more in these terms of what we in social science loosely refer to as modernization. ■