

Abstract. Not for quotation.

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Abstract to Session 1: After parliamentary and presidential elections: Where is Russia going?

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1. The results of the elections

Both electoral tours – in Autumn 2003 and Spring 2004 – were implemented in a traditional modern Russian *technological* discourse. The start of the campaign was signaled by the notorious anti-oligarch ‘report’ in early Summer 2003, Khodorkovsky-UKOS case followed in July. In August the anti-‘siloviki’ report was disseminated. By late March 2004 both groups found themselves distanced from the Kremlin. Political technologies in Russia are more than PR, they are the essence of politics. Nevertheless, in sum, the results of the elections are surprisingly reflective of the societal moods and state of the art. They witness for

- dominating concern for political and economic stability by any means and, thus, indifference to the nature of the political regime (autocratic or democratic); (landslide victory of V. Putin and “United Russia”)
- support to the strengthening of Russian statehood; (the same)
- dissatisfaction with the situation in the social sphere and preserving paternalist moods; (stable support for the communists, in spite of splitting political technologies)
- extreme social-economic differentiation; (the same)
- increasing xenophobia; (the surprising – and unexpected and unintended by Kremlin – success of “Rodina”)
- non-response to liberalism in its national form and failure of Russian liberal-democrats (see the article ‘The Crisis of Liberalism in Russia’ by M. Khodorkovski in “Vedomosti” daily 29.03.04); (the failure of “Yabloko” and Union of Right Forces)

The elections

- provided for unquestionable legitimacy of the president;
- led to further concentration of presidential power – and his responsibility;
- decreased to a minimum the role of legislature (to unquestionably adopt the laws and sometimes make up with anti-Western rhetoric for pro-Western foreign and security policy of the Kremlin) and executive power (new ‘technical’ government);
- narrowed the levers and actors for political and economic reforms;

- further destroyed a weak political parties and civil society tissue in Russia;
- highlighted the priorities for 2004 – 2008:
 - providing for acceptable social guarantees;
 - decreasing the humiliating rate of poverty;
 - accelerated restructuring of the economy still remaining the hostage of the oil prices or shifting from the dominating orientation and status of oil-gas-raw materials supplier – thus changing and strengthening Russian positions in the global economy;
 - providing for security (the main threat being terrorism).

2. The scenarios 2004-2008

To avoid the risk of nationalist left *revanche* and simultaneously push economic modernization – *this super double task* – makes the Kremlin to look for the solution on the road of converting dividends from still high oil prices into both social sphere and modernization. Hardly reachable at all this task can definitely not be implemented, particularly in a very short time, without levers of strengthened state control and autocratic political regime. Thus, the chances for more democracy in Russia in the next four years are very low (at least according to the Western also decaying democratic standards and values). Scenarios discussed in the West based on the interplay of two alternatives – strong vs. weak president (“who is Mr. Putin?”) and liberal vs. state controlled reforms – in the situation of time deficit leave no choice, but *combination of strong president and state control*. It is no surprise that V.Putin demands, that the government urgently defines ‘the points of growth’. Good news is that the Kremlin refused from the widely discussed proposals to introduce natural rent and went along the line of changes in taxation.

The lack of realistic alternatives to the suggested scenario would make the outward pressure and criticism of deficit of democracy in Russia rather ineffective, irritating – and partly – hypocritical.

3. Relations with the West

By the beginning of Putin’s second presidency Russia has become a much more predictable and ‘comfortable’ partner to the West. It is a politically and economically stable country which has overcome the crisis of national identity of the 90-ies.

Russia is unlikely to change priorities in its foreign and security policy. The purpose of the foreign and security policy remains creating favorable conditions for inner development. And this, among others, means foreign investments. Modernization is interpreted in terms of post-industrial economics, hardly achievable in the situation of autarchy (though the proponents of this strategy remain rather numerous in the expert community; the development within the post-soviet space can be regarded as a variant of semi-autarchy – see below).

4. Russia – EU – the United States

The approach to the cooperation with the West in the foreseeable future is likely to preserve the existing ‘division of labor’ – whether it is constructive or detrimental for

cooperation and Western consolidation: Russian partnership with the United States will mainly concern the security domain, meanwhile cooperation with the EU would develop along the '*economic plus*' axis (three common policy spaces – St. Petersburg, May 2003).

The present crisis in the Russian-EU relations and the change of 'dull' agenda 'of concerns' is difficult to be overcome in the nearest future. In the EU the process of digesting and adapting of the new members will hardly leave a space for the elaborating of revealing concepts or steps in regard to Russia. The impact of the new member-states and their vision (which is not unique and is an issue for analysis per se) may push Brussels in two directions. Either towards more cohesion in its own development (overlapping euro-regions with a strong coordinating nucleus vs. center-periphery pattern) and, consequentially, defining the *real* framework of the EU-Russian relations. Or, as many Russian analysts suggest, to the contrary, enhance ideological component, thus moving the EU towards further accelerated enlargement to the East (Moldova and Ukraine) not accompanied by the enhanced partnership with Russia.

One of the solutions can be on the road of enhanced cooperation in the Baltic sea region.

The results of the US presidential elections, whether G. Bush stays in power or democrats win, do not precondition the continuation of vs. shifting from the present dominating international unilateral course with the focus on the use of power. It would rather depend on the developments in Iraq, in the Middle East, pace of WMD and, in particular, nuclear proliferation (Northern Korea, Iran) activities of terrorist networks, thus remaining more *circumstantial*. The changes in policy towards Russia (namely focus on democratic freedoms and values and Chechnya) though much more likely under democrats cannot well be excluded in the second G. Bush, Jr. administration. What matters more in relations with Russia is the development of the US grand design vision of the post-Soviet space, in particular the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The West-West transatlantic dimension – very important for Russia-Western relations – is unlikely to acquire a more stable character. The traditional value tissue and institutional frameworks degrade with increasing pace under the pressure of complex circumstances. Starting from the ethnic-social-economic composition changes in European states, causing outbursts of nationalist moods on different scale and pertinence and finishing with the serious political domestic consequences and likely international repercussions, like the world witnessed during elections in Spain after the terrorist attack in Madrid.

5. Influence by the Asian-Pacific region

The coming developments in the Asian-Pacific region, first and foremost China, are likely to influence Russian-Western relations in growing degree. Elucidating for Russian foreign policy are likely to be the developments in its relations with Japan.

6. Russian policy towards New Independent States and Russian-Western relations

In the last four years Russian policy towards New Independent States has acquired definitely new substance, which in general can be characterized as Realpolitik. On

the one hand, Russia has overcome identity schizophrenia and general basic perception of the NIS is that of sovereign states. On the other hand, particularly after present post 11/09/2001 framework of relations with the West has been established, Russia conceives its position in these states as a potential for its economic development (using predominantly private business actors) and a lever to strengthen its security.

The gap between the readiness of the West (in 2001-2002) for more active Russian policy in the NIS and the moment when Russia started these policies (2003) is one, but not single, reason for the tensions and new high profile of the NIS topic in Russian-Western relations.

Clearly articulated aims in regard to the NIS in economic and security sphere by Russia, the US and European Union, as well as more coherent vision of their partnership makes possible to avoid controversies over the NIS in Russian-Western relations and even develop cooperation there.

7. Mechanisms of cooperation

The existing mechanisms are not sufficient for building trust, understanding and cooperation in the Russian-Western relations.