

# Victory expected for United Russia in the Russia General Elections

de **Corinne Deloy****ANALYSIS**1 month before  
the poll

The date of the next Russian elections (4th December) was announced on 30th August last by the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitri Medvedev. Seven political parties will run to renew the Duma, the lower chamber of Parliament, i.e. -4 in comparison with the election on 2nd December 2007.

1,813,522 Russians living abroad have registered to fulfil their civic duty. 300 polling stations will be open for them in 140 countries. In the last general elections on 2nd December 2007 18.1% of them voted.

On the same day as the general elections Russians are also being asked to appoint the 1,210 representatives in the 27 regional parliaments. More than 2,500 local elections will also take place on 4th December. In all, around 50,000 people will be running in these elections.

Over the last four years Russian political life has been focused on one question only: who will the next President of the Republic be? Will Vladimir Putin (United Russia, ER), presently Prime Minister and former Head of State (2000-2008), stand for the supreme office? The head of government answered that question on 24th September. He will stand for the presidency, which will take place on 4th March next. After his planned victory he will exchange places with the present head of State, Dmitri Medvedev, who will then become Prime Minister again. So the suspense is over – everything has been decided

If in democracies we wait until we have the election results to discover the name of the next leader – in Russia it is the other way round.

## Announced victory for United Russia

On 24th September last, 11,000 United Russia sympathisers gathered at the Sports Stadium of Lujniki in Moscow to listen to the speeches delivered by Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev. Vladimir Putin said he wanted Dmitri Medvedev to lead the United Russia list in the general elections on 4th December next, and then D. Medvedev proposed that V. Putin run for president on 4th March 2012; finally V. Putin promised to give the post of Prime Minister that he presently occupies to Dmitri Medvedev when he is re-elected as Head of State. This is a perfect, well planned scenario that will enable Vladimir Putin, if he is re-elected in 2018, to

rule until 2024, i.e. nearly a quarter of a century in all. The general elections on 4th December next are therefore, a vote in support of Vladimir Putin. "I want to say that we agreed on what we would do several years ago," declared the outgoing Prime Minister. "Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin does not mean a return to the past but something else: it is a way of rising to the challenges that we have set ourselves," indicated Russian President Dmitri Medvedev on 15th October last – he did however speak in support of a wider government, which in the future, "would leave some room for those who are not totally in agreement with us."

"We have not seen strategies like this since Stalin and his personality cult" declared political expert Gleb Pavlovsky. "Never have the elections been turned into such a joke as now," says Stanislav Belkovsky, founder and director of the National Strategy Institute and of the communication company Politech. "Thirty years ago it was easy to blame the Communist Party as the only one responsible for the situation. Right now, because of our apathy, we alone are responsible for our sad fate," stresses Andrey Erofeev, art historian and specialist of the Russian avant-garde movement of the beginning of the 21st century and former dissident. Although Vladimir Putin wants to become head of State again and retain power, it is out of the question however for him to copy the "president" of Belarus, Aleksander Lukashenko, and renew his mandate as and when he likes. Vladimir Putin, who has transferred most of the presidential prerogatives over to the chair of the

## General elections in Russia 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011

---

Council of Ministers which he has held since 2008, (which is not in line with the Russian Constitution) and retained the control of the secret services, the legal system, the civil service and defence, as well as a monopoly of raw materials, claims however to respect these institutions.

Dmitri Medvedev enjoys the image of a young, liberal man, who carries high the banner of his country's modernisation, such as the primacy of law for example – and this pleases the Western public. The present Russian president has accepted many thankless tasks (such as dismissing the former Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Lujkov) and taking the blame for the country's problems, so that Vladimir Putin could maintain his image as the country's saviour and as the only one able to resolve any crises.

However, D. Medvedev has been heard criticising the corruption that riddles the country, likewise the poor results produced by Russian civil servants and businesses.

On 17th March 2011 the outgoing president did not oppose NATO establishing a military coalition to protect the civilian populations with air strikes in Libya, an all time first for Russia in the last 20 years. On 30th March last D. Medvedev criticised the conflicts of interest that the presence of government members on the executive boards of the biggest national companies represents (Gazprom, Aeroflot, Rosneft and the VTB bank). He was notably targeting Igor Sechin, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of Rosneft, Alexey Kudrin, Finance Minister and Chairman of the VTB bank and member of the board of the mining company Alrosa and also Igor Levitin, Transport Minister and Chairman of the airline Aeroflot. On July 1st the outgoing president again asked Vladimir Putin to put an end to this kind of accumulation of power.

The election campaign is a farce, whose only goal is to prevent the emergence of any alternative political force. Vladimir Putin's decision to place a tight hold on the general and presidential elections can be explained by the country's economic and social situation, which is a cause of concern mid-term. Although it limits the risks run by those in office (an electoral campaign is always an invitation to debate and encourages battles for influence), the outgoing Prime Minister's announcement removes all matter of interest from the election which may lead to a high rate of voter abstention.

One consequence of the announced inversion of the roles is that on 26th September Finance Minister Alexey Kudrin resigned, since undoubtedly he had hoped to

become Prime Minister, saying that he refused to serve in a government led by Dmitri Medvedev. The Finance Minister was replaced by his deputy Anton Siluanov. Vladimir Putin wants to turn Russia, at present the world's 10th biggest economy, into the one of the fifth first. He hopes to bring the GDP/capita up to 26,000€ (10,500€ at present) in 10 years. The outgoing Prime Minister created the Strategic Initiatives Agency, alongside the Committee for Modernisation founded by Dmitri Medvedev, whose aim it is to promote the country's young talent. "Russia needs calm, stable development that is void of disruption and rash experiments based on unjustified liberalism and social demagoguery," declared the head of government.

In an article published by the daily Izvestia on 4th October, Vladimir Putin suggested the creation of a Eurasian Union with the former Soviet Republics. "We are suggesting a powerful, supranational unification model, close integration according to new political and economic values so that we can become one of the focal points of the modern world," he wrote.

The outgoing Prime Minister created the All Russia People's Front last May with the aim of "coordinating all of those who are not indifferent to the fate of Russia." The organisation brings together "the vital forces" in Russian society: individuals, associations and also companies, unions, war veterans from Afghanistan, youth movement leaders, etc. 40,000 employees of the Siberian industrial holding, Sibirski Devoloy Soyuz have joined the Front, likewise railway and postal employees. The Front is allowed to cooperate with foreign political parties, for example with the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU), led by Natalia Vitrenko. In 1937 the Bolshevik Party created a bloc like this so that citizens' associations and workers committees would support the regime.

"Vladimir Putin is no longer confident in his party. The latter can no longer guarantee that it will retain its 2/3 constitutional majority except if it stages infringements that the outgoing Prime Minister, who wants to protect his international reputation, refuses to do. This is why he decided to create the All Russia People's Front," indicates Alexey Mukin, director of the Political Information Centre.

Vladimir Putin has also demanded the systematic organisation of primaries (praïmeriz) for the selection of United Russia candidates standing in the general elections. The organisation of primaries was made obligatory at the 11th United Russia congress in November 2009. These took place between 21st July and 25th

August last. They rallied 226,000 voters for 4,700 candidates (700 during the primaries organised for the general elections on 2nd December 2007) 58% of whom were members of NGO's (2,000 are affiliated to the All Russia People's Front), 36% members of United Russia and 6% of independents. A minimum of 150-600 places on the United Russia list in the general election was reserved for the representatives of the All Russia People's Front.

The outgoing Prime Minister said that thanks to the primaries he saw how the most effective representatives could be selected and therefore how the ruling power could be more effective. In reality United Russia is losing ground, the party is described by one third of Russians (34%) as "a party of civil servants and scoundrels" according to a poll by Levada. Hence the care invested in the candidate selection process, to the modification in the means of recruitment and the emphasis placed on the way competition has been established. However many political observers believe that the latter was biased due the centralisation of the candidate selection process.

Vladimir Putin has suggested that the primaries should be obligatory for all parties in all elections (national, regional and local) in order to "develop political life". "In my opinion it is interference in the internal affairs of political life. Every party defines the means, methods and criteria for the appointment of its candidates in an election," answered Igor Lebedev, leader of the Parliamentary group of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR). United Russia has set itself the goal of winning the constitutional 2/3 majority in the Duma on 4th December next.

### The other parties in the race

There are two main nationalist parties in Russia: the Communist Party (KPRF), led by Guennady Zyuganov and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) led by Vladimir Jirinovski. The latter started a tour of Russia, promising fiscal returns and facilities. His party has chosen the motto "For the Russians" and says that it is fighting so that "Russians do not have to suffer discrimination in their own country." V. Jirinovski has promised to build an "ethnic State" for the "heroic people, which the Russian are." The Liberal Democratic Party proves to be very useful in channelling nationalist feeling that is rising in Russia. According to the institute Levada, 46% of Russians say they are xenophobic (41% in 2009). Moreover 45% say they are against the country's other ethnic groups (38%, two years ago). The Liberal Democratic Party hopes to become the second most important party in the Duma with 25% of the vote.

The Communist Party defends the nationalisation of companies owned by the oligarchs and the introduction of progressive taxation. It is however careful about the criticism it makes of the ruling party. Its leader Guennady Zyuganov will lead the communist list. Amongst the candidates we find Viktor Cherkesov, former director of the federal drugs surveillance service (FSKN), Zhores Alfyorov, Nobel Physics Prize winner in 2000 and cosmonaut Svetlana Savitskaya. The communists have set themselves a high target in the general elections on 4th December next, since they hope to win 20% of the vote.

A Just Russia (SR), the social democratic party, has been marginalised. Its former leader Serguey Mironov, was removed from his post as chair of the Council of the Federation and the party has lost many members (Duma spokesperson Alexander Babakov joined United Russia).

In 2007, Serguey Mironov suggested a merger between his party and the communist party to create a unified socialist movement. The proposal was rejected by Guennady Zyuganov who qualified A Just Russia's position as a "total farce". The party's new leader, Nikolay Levichev, repeated the proposal so that the left alliance could win a majority in the general elections on 4th December next. In his opinion this union is "logical because the main lines of the communist party programme have been almost the same as those put forward by A Just Russia for several years."

The party has suggested a 300% increase in the fines set in the event infringements made against the labour law, progressive taxation rates, new anti-corruption laws and an increase in retirement pensions. It hopes to win 15% of the vote in the election.

Just Cause (PD) lies to the centre right of the political scale and was created in 2008 after the merger of three liberal movements (Civilian Force, the Democratic Party and the Union of Rightwing Forces). On 25th June last billionaire and businessman Mikhail Prokhorov (believed by some to be the richest man in Russia; his fortune is estimated at 9.3 billion €), who heads the investment company Onexim, was elected unanimously as the party's leader at a congress that was broadcast on TV, undeniable proof that Just Cause is close to the Kremlin. "I suggest that we exclude the word opposition from my vocabulary" declared Mikhail Prokhorov, who has however been dismissed since and banned from taking part in the elections on 4th December next. He was replaced by Andrey Duanayev on 20th September.

### The Russian Political System

The Federal Assembly of the Federation of Russia com-

## General elections in Russia 4<sup>th</sup> December 2011

---

prises two Houses: the Federation Council, the Upper House, comprising 178 members and the State Duma, the Lower House, comprising 450 MPs elected for four years. As of the election on 4th December they will be elected every 5 years.

MPs are elected by integral proportional representation based on federal lists that can comprise up to 600 names each, in one single electoral constituency. A minimum of 7% of the votes cast is required to be represented in the Duma. This threshold does vary however; indeed parties that win between 5% and 7% of the vote on 4th December will have one or two seats. The reduction of the minimum to 5% of the votes cast to be represented in the Duma will officially be applied as of January 2013.

The Russian Constitution stipulates that at least two parties have to be represented in the Duma. As a result if only one party achieves a result over 7% of the vote, the party that comes second enters the Duma, whatever the percentage of votes it has won. Finally parties that win more than 4% of the vote are reimbursed their campaign fees.

To take part in the general elections a party has to have 50,000 members or a minimum of 500 members in at least 44 of the country's 46 regions. Also the parties which are represented in the present Duma have to pay a deposit of 60 million roubles (1.3 million €) or have 200,000 voters' signatures; no more than 10,000 of them can come from the same region nor can they be Russians living abroad. Finally the electoral law allows candidates to stand both in the general and regional elections, which take place on the same day.

4 political parties are represented in the present Duma:

- United Russia, holds the majority in parliament, led since 2007 by outgoing Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Founded in December 2001 after the merger of two parties Unity and Fatherland-All Russia, it has 315 MPs;
- the Communist Party (KPRF), the country's leading opposition party, founded in 1993 by Guennady Zyuganov, it has 180,000 members and 57 seats;
- the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), an ultra nationalist, populist party founded in 1989 and led by Vladimir Jirinovski; it comprises 40 MPs;
- A Just Russia (SR), created in 2006 after the merger of Rodina (Fatherland), the Russian Life Party and the Russian Pensioners' Party – led by Nikolay Levichev with 38 seats.

The Council of the Federation comprises 166 members i.e. 2 representatives of the legislative and executive power of each of the 83 entities that comprise the Federation of Russia (21 republics, 9 administrative territories, 46 regions, 1 autonomous region, 4 autonomous district and 2 federal cities). The duration of the mandate varies depending on the republic or the region. Russia is divided into 7 federal constituencies (Centre, North West, South, the Volga Basin, Urals, Siberia and the Far East), each led by a plenipotentiary representative of the president.

The President of the Russian Federation is elected by universal suffrage every four years. Dmitri Medvedev was elected on 2nd March 2008 in the first round of the election winning 70.28% of the vote. Turn out totalled 63.78%. The present head of State passed a law in 2008 which increases the duration of the mandate to six years. In spite of the image of strength that Russia's leaders would like to give, the country is at a crossroads. Russia wonders about its position in the world. "No, Russia has not yet chosen its path and I am not sure that it can do so in the near future. The question "does Russia belong to the West" has not been decided but has been made more complicated by the crisis ongoing in Europe. It has become very difficult for the country to be European mentally and look increasingly towards Asia from an economic point of view. Moscow is intellectually confused about its future. It has no model to follow and is unable to produce one of its own," stresses Fyodor Lukyanov, chief editor in Moscow of Russia in Global Affairs.

The ratings agency Standard&Poor's announced that it was maintaining its BBB rating. It did however say that the almost guaranteed return of Vladimir Putin as Head of State could be a long term obstacle to Russia's growth. "We think that the role switch and people could complicate the country's task in facing challenges, such as improving the business climate, competition and manufacturing infrastructures and the maintenance of long term growth." The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts GDP growth of 4.8% this year and 4.5% in 2012. The international organisation has said that Moscow will certainly have problems in attracting foreign capital because of political uncertainty, the weakness of the banking system and the dangerous climate that reigns over the country.

According to Valery Federov, director of VTsIOM, only

four parties – United Russia, the Communist Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and a Just Russia – will enter the next Duma. Finally, according to a poll by Levada, more than half of the Russians (53%) believe that the general elections are a sham and one person in two (49%) is expecting that results will be tampered with.

According to the latest poll by FOM at the end of October; United Russia is due to win 40%, the Communist

Party, 12%, the Liberal Democratic Party 10% and a Just Russia 5%.

Disappointed by their political leaders, the Russians mostly show total indifference with regard to the election on 4th December next. A decline in their material situation and dark economic prospects may however change the situation. According to Levada, 41% of Russians look on Vladimir Putin's return to power with indifference.

#### Reminder of the General Election Results on 2nd December 2007 in Russia

Turnout: 63.71%

Political Parties	No./votes won	% votes won	No. of seats
<b>United Russia (ER)</b>	44 714 241	64,30	315
<b>Communist Party (KPRF)</b>	8 046 886	11,57	57
<b>Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR)</b>	5 660 823	8,14	40
<b>A Just Russia (SR)</b>	5 383 639	7,74	38
<b>Others</b>	5 731 476	8,25	0

Source : Internet Site of the Russian Electoral Commission

([http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100021960186&vrn=100100021960181&region=0&global=1&sub\\_region=0&prver=0&prnetvd=null&vibid=100100021960186&type=242](http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100021960186&vrn=100100021960181&region=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&prnetvd=null&vibid=100100021960186&type=242) )

See all of our publications on our site:  
[www.robert-schuman.eu](http://www.robert-schuman.eu)

Publishing director : Pascale JOANNIN

**THE ROBERT SCHUMAN FOUNDATION**, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organization of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.