

Presidential Election Russia, an unsurprising election

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ANALYSIS
1 month before
the poll

On 24th September 2011 Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin (United Russia, ER) said he wanted Dmitry Medvedev to lead United Russia's list in the general elections that took place on 4th December last, and then Dmitry Medvedev said he was going to support the outgoing Prime Minister's bid in the presidential election on 4th March 2012, with Vladimir Putin promising to grant the post of Prime Minister to Dmitry Medvedev when he was elected head of State. *"In no uncertain terms I want to say that we came to an agreement some years ago about what we would do,"* declared Vladimir Putin. Russia's main leaders have therefore decided to exchange posts, a tactic, that according to the polls, deeply displeased many Russians. *"We have not seen behaviour like this since Stalin and his personality cult,"* declared political expert Gleb Pavlovsky. *"The elections have never been turned into a farce like this,"* maintains Stanislas Belkovsky, the founder and director of the National Strategy Institute and the communication company Politech.

Nothing will be at stake therefore in the presidential election on 4th March next, since victory for Vladimir Putin seems already to have been decided. Some issues remain however: will the outgoing Prime Minister be elected in the first round? And above all what will happen after the election?

General Elections under Challenge

On 4th December 2011 Dmitry Medvedev's and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's party, United Russia (ER) won the general elections taking 49.32% of the vote, i.e. 238 of the 450 seats in the Duma, the lower chamber of Parliament. These were the weakest results ever recorded by ER. Moreover their announcement was the source of great anger on the part of some of the population who denounced electoral fraud. This was accompanied by a strong movement of protest, the strongest since Putin took power in 2000.

On 10th December around 50,000 people demonstrated, with a white ribbon in their buttonhole (Belatenta) in Bolotnaya Square in Moscow demanding the cancellation of the election. On 24th December again 85,000 turned out to demonstrate in Andrey Sakharov Ave against the electoral fraud that took place on 4th December and the arrests and the sentencing of some demonstrators to firm prison sentences – they also demanded Vladimir Putin's resignation. The movement spread to the provinces, a rare event in Russia: St Petersburg, Gorno-Altaysk, Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Kazan, Perm, Nizhniy Novgorod, Bryansk and Arkhangelsk.

Opposition to Vladimir Putin's regime is quite diverse

and sometimes the tension is high between the leaders of the various movements. The demonstrations rallied those close to the far left, communists, liberals, nationalists, those fighting corruption, like blogger Alexey Navalny, to whom we owe the expression "a party of thieves and con-men" (*partiya vorov i zhulikov*) given to United Russia; Navalny was also the creator of the community web site in 2010 RosPil (pillage of Russia), which condemns the embezzlement of public goods and corruption. This is said to represent some \$300 billion, i.e. one third of the State's budget. Navalny became famous by revealing the financial embezzlement that the VTB, an 85% State-owned bank was undertaking – likewise Transneft, the company that has a monopoly over the oil-pipelines, accused of stealing €2.9 billion during the building of the Siberia-Pacific pipeline. On 5th December the blogger was arrested by the police and imprisoned for two weeks. Agreement seems to be impossible between the liberals, nationalists and even the communists and no leader has really emerged from this protest movement. The politicians present in the demonstrations also irritated the crowd.

"The lack of a political figure behind whom the movement might rally is its greatest weakness and yet its greatest strength," says political expert Andrey Grachev, former spokesperson (1990-1991) of the Se-

cretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1985-1991) Mikhail Gorbachev during *perestroika*.

On 31st January around fifty opponents, including Eduard Limonov, who was excluded from the presidential race, were arrested during a demonstration that had not been given permission to rally in Moscow (on 31st of each month, of those which have 31 days, a demonstration is organised to defend article 31 of the Constitution that guarantees the freedom to assemble). On 1st February a 140m2 banner bearing the slogan "*Putin, get out*" and a caricature of the Prime Minister, who had been crossed out in black, was attached to a building just opposite the Kremlin on a quay next to the Moskva. Another demonstration took place on 4th February between October Square and Bolotnaya Square.

"The general elections on 4th December 2011 did not respect electoral standards," declared the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) whose mission it was to observe the election. It witnessed various infringements (ballot stuffing, multiple voting, etc.) and deplored the hundreds of arrests of opposition militants who wanted to demonstrate on the day. Moreover many videos showing massive infringement operations were put on-line and seen by millions of Russians. *"What we saw on the TV never existed in the past"* maintained journalist Yulia Latynina. The internet penetration rate in Russia is 46%, so 52.9 million people have access to the world web at least once a month. Another new phenomenon was the response given by Patriarch Kirill of the Orthodox Church, who defended the demonstrators, whom he said were *"acting in legitimate protest"* against the corruption of the elites. Finally, Mikhail Gorbachev declared his *"shame"* of having supported Vladimir Putin in 2000 and said *"I would advise Mr Putin to leave now."*

The Prime Minister has said that polling stations will be equipped with cameras on 4th March. *"The latter will not enable the filming of the counting process, the recording of the results and the conditions of their storage,"* stresses Heidi Tagliavini, head of the OSCE's Russian observation mission.

Although Putin is far from having been ousted from power, his relationship with the Russian people has changed. *"The myth of the omnipotent Vladimir Putin has collapsed,"* said a blogger on radio "Moscow Echo"

on 16th December. Indeed the Russians seem to have freed themselves from a certain kind of fear. Moreover electoral fraud is not the only cause of discontent and the only reason for bringing demonstrators out on the street. The Russian middle class, that is rising rapidly, is increasingly expressing its discontent with the regime in office, whose inefficacy and corruption it criticises. This was a factor that enabled the Communist Party (KPRF) and Fair Russia (SR) to improve their results in the general elections (the two parties won 19.19% and 13.24% of the vote respectively, i.e. 92 and 64 seats in the Duma). United Russia came second and even third in several towns. And so it won 21% of the vote in Dubna (48% in the previous general election on 2nd December 2007) and 22% in Korolev, the town in which the Space Agency has its flight control centre (59% four years ago).

According to a poll undertaken by the Levada Centre, and published at the end of December 2011, three quarters of the Russians (73%) say they are dissatisfied with the government's policy *"There is an enormous problem of legitimacy. This movement is carried along by people who are not politicised,"* stresses Carine Clément, director of the Collective Action Institute in Moscow, adding *"it is a question of making this movement last and politicising it, of transforming offended dignity into sustainable commitment, everywhere in Russia."* *"The ruling power is now in an historical dead-end, it insists on provoking and discrediting the organisers of the demonstrations but above all it is preparing its vengeance,"* says Andrey Illaryonov, chairman of the Economic Analysis Institute. With his back to the wall, Vladimir Putin has one alternative: step up the authoritarian tendencies of his regime or accept the pluralisation of the political arena. For the time being he has not ruled out reserving some government posts for the opposition after his victory on 4th March next. *"I have already said that I had invited the leaders of the parties deemed as being the opposition to participate, for example Fair Cause (PD) and Yabloko. These people have worked and continue to work effectively and I do not see anything impossible in that,"* he maintained.

Vladimir Putin counter attacks

"The general elections are over. Discussion over revising the results is out of the question," this was the response Putin gave to demonstrators. *"In my opinion the election results undeniably reflect public opinion,"*

he added. As usual he accused the demonstrators of "having a Russian passport" but of working for "a foreign power and enjoying funding from abroad." He stressed that "the opposition is leading Russia into chaos."

Vladimir Putin attempted to analyse the situation. "We have been through a period of serious crisis. It is clear that this has affected people negatively, that living standards have dropped, that many people have lost their job. This is why it is much easier for the opposition to recruit," he explained. However he regretted that dialogue with his opponents had been made "impossible because of the movement's disorganisation, which has neither leader nor programme." On 15th December he spoke on television for four and a half hours, during which time he answered viewers' questions. He invited political leaders to communicate better saying that the Russians needed national psychotherapy. He promised a transparent, objective election on 4th March. "As a candidate I don't need to cheat." He said he was ready to look into relaxing the laws on the registration of political parties and called for the re-introduction of the election of the regional leaders by direct universal suffrage (under certain conditions) – who are appointed by the regime in office – a possibility he abolished himself during his first term in office (2000-2004) using as his excuse the terrorist attacks in Beslan (1st-3rd September 2004) when Chechen terrorists took hundreds of children hostage in a school in North Ossetia and which led to around 350 deaths. In his opinion these attacks revealed the disloyalty of the regional authorities.

With regard to the economy Vladimir Putin published an article at the end of January in the economic daily Vedomosti in which he criticises "systemic corruption", maintaining that the business climate is "unsatisfactory" and qualified the dependency of the Russian economy on raw materials as "inadmissible". "In comparison with our competitors our country is much more attractive for investors. We have recorded significant leaks in capital. The main problem is the lack of transparency, the lack of control by society over the civil servants, customs and fiscal services, the legal system and the police force. There is systemic corruption if we call things by their proper name," he declared. The Court of Auditors noted 10,300 corruption offences in

its 2011 annual report and believed that fraud totalled 718.5 billion roubles (€17.8 billion), a record sum since the 20th century. Vladimir Putin said that doing away with kickback payments on State orders would lead to savings of "between 5% to 10% of the federal budget, i.e. between 1% and 2% of the GDP per year." At the end of December he asked Russian State companies' heads to divulge to the State the shareholder structure of each of their business partners. He suggested providing more funds to scientific research and investments in high tech industries, pharmacy, the chemical industry, aviation and communication. "By investing in the competitiveness of leading sectors, Russia will also resolve an overall social problem, i.e. the development of a creative class and the possibility for it to fulfil itself," he indicated. Finally on 12th January Vladimir Putin launched his internet site (www.putin2012.ru). Immediately internet users entered negative comments, some asking him to resign from office or not to stand in the presidential election. These were rapidly removed and replaced by new, more politically correct messages.

The other candidates

5 people are standing in the presidential election. Apart from Vladimir Putin there is:

- Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the country's main opposition party, the Communist Party (KPRF);
- Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, founder and leader of the ultra-nationalist, populist party – the Liberal Democratic Party – LDPR);
- Sergey Mironov, Russia of Justice –Just Russia;
- Mikhail Prokhorov, leader of Right Cause (Pravoe Delo, PD), a billionaire and businessman (believed by some to be the richest man in Russia; his fortune is estimated at €9.3 billion) and leader of the investment company Onexim.

In his programme entitled "A real future" Mikhail Prokhorov proposes the creation of a common economic area between Russia and the EU and the introduction of a new world currency based on the euro and the rouble. He maintains that if he is elected his first action will be to free Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, former CEO of the Russian oil company, in prison since 2004 for theft, fraud and tax evasion (accusations that he has always rejected), to whom he will offer the post of Prime Minister (if

the latter refuses, the position will be offered to former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, who resigned from office on 26th September last). Mikhail Prokhorov spoke in favour of the privatisation of State companies, a way for him to solve the State's deficit issues. "We now need a generation that is ready to launch real reform, which considers democracy and liberalism as common values. The genie has escaped from the bottle and will no longer return inside. The era of governed democracy is over," he maintained in an article published by the British daily The Guardian on 11th January. The leader of Right Cause said that he would limit the presidential function to one mandate and committed to reducing the minimum voting threshold to 3% for a party to be able to have a seat in the Duma and to re-introduce "the vote against everyone" that was abolished by Vladimir Putin. <http://www.pravovedelo.ru/>

"The Kremlin is promoting Mikhail Prokhorov's candidature to calm the demonstrations and so that the whole world will be excited to see a nice chap standing in the presidential election," declared Stanislav Belkovski, director of the National Strategy Institute in Moscow. "Mikhail Prokhorov is trying to follow Vladimir Putin's example and is positioning himself as a catch-all candidate," indicates Olga Mifodyeya from the Political Technology Centre.

Sergey Mironov says he supports social change "so that people understand where we are going." He said that he would resign after two years if he were to be elected and would probably organise another presidential election. "I am quite aware that the election will mainly comprise a protest vote, since people want anyone but Vladimir Putin," he indicated.

Grigory Yavlinsky, founder of the liberal Yabloko party was not allowed to stand <http://yavlinsky.ru> The electoral commission deemed that at least 24% of the signatures that he had collated could not be accepted. By eliminating him Vladimir Putin killed two birds with one stone since he thereby prevented observers' access to the polling stations – who previously pointed to the infringements committed in the general elections. Moreover some political analysts believe that if Grigory Yavlinsky had run it would have been an obstacle to Vladimir Putin's victory in the first round. On 1st February

the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, called on Russia's Central Electoral Commission to review its refusal to register Grigory Yavlinsky.

The Presidential Post in Russia

Now elected for six years, the President of the Federation of Russia enjoys great powers. Head of the executive, he appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister, he can dissolve the Duma, submit draft laws to Parliament and he can suggest referenda. He also decides on the appointments in the army and the security services, appoints the judges in the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court, the Court of Auditors and the Arbitration Court. He cannot be elected for more than two consecutive mandates.

Anyone standing for the supreme office has to be aged at least 35 and to have been living in Russia for a minimum of ten years. Any candidate whose party is not represented in the Duma must absolutely rally at least 500 declarations of support and 2 million signatures from the electorate, and these have to be collated in at least half of the country.

In spite of the protests that have taken place since the general election Vladimir Putin is still the favourite in the presidential election on 4th March next – which will herald his return to the Kremlin, which he had to leave in 2008 after two consecutive mandates (2000-2008). According to the most recent poll by POM and published in the daily Kommersant on 26th January last, the Prime Minister is due to win 44% of the vote, Guennadi Zyuganov 11%, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, 9%, Sergey Mironov and Mikhail Prokhorov 4% each.

There is suspense over whether Vladimir Putin will succeed in winning in the first round. Although defeat seems impossible, a second round would reveal the incapacity of United Russia's leader to rally half of the electorate to his name. And this would be a failure in the eyes of many. On February 1st the Prime Minister admitted that he might not win enough votes to take the first round on 4th March next. "It is not bad if there is a second round," declared Vladimir Putin who did however warn his fellow countrymen against "destabilising the political situation".

Reminder of the presidential election results of 2nd March 2008 in Russia

Turn out: 63.78%

Candidates	No. of votes won	% of votes won
Dmitry Medvedev (United Russia, ER)	52 530 712	71.25
Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party, KPRF)	13 243 550	17.96
Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (Democratic Liberal Party, LDPR)	6 988 510	9.48
Andrei Bogdanov (Democratic Party, DPR)	968 344	1.31

Source : the Central Electoral Commission of Russia <http://cikrf.ru/eng/>

Will Vladimir Putin be elected in the first round of the presidential election in Russia?

Around 110 million Russians are being called to vote on 4th March next to appoint the successor to Dmitri Medvedev (United Russia, ER), as president of the Federation of Russia. The outgoing Prime Minister and former Head of State (2000-2008), Vladimir Putin, is running favourite in an election the outcome of which has almost been decided from the start. The only suspense remaining is over the date of his future victory: will he be elected in the first round on 4th March or will he have to wait a few days more before returning as Head of State?

The vote for the presidential election started on 18th February last in the most distant areas of Russia (close to the North Poland and in the country's far east), for some professions (military, lighthouse keepers and sailors etc ...) as well as for Russians living abroad.

D-7
7 days before
the poll

The general elections on 4th December last, which were won by the party in office, United Russia, were the source of anger on the part of some of the Russian population, who came down into the streets to denounce the electoral fraud that had taken place. The protest was the most virulent since Vladimir Putin rose to power 12 years ago. Since that time the situation has changed: whilst the Russians had suspected electoral fraud, they are now able to see the facts on the internet, several people indeed filmed various incidents that they then put on line.

Vladimir Putin supporters and the opposition movements demonstrated separately on 4th February in Moscow. The former rallied in Victory Park in Moscow under the banner "We have something to lose". They deployed a big banner on which they had written "Our vote will be for Putin". Opponents to the outgoing Prime Minister rallied on the same day under the banner "For

honest elections". They brandished condoms and dollars in answer to Vladimir Putin, who compared the white ribbon, the protest movement's symbol, to a condom that had been funded from abroad. Their slogans were also focused the outgoing Prime Minister himself. The opposition also demonstrated in several towns in the provinces: 3000 rallied in St Petersburg, others in Magadan, Kabarovsk, Ekaterinburg, Irkutsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Chelyabinsk, Ufa; Krasnodar, Sochi, Nijni Novogorod etc ...

The opposition is divided however and tension, even conflict, has been widespread amongst the representatives of the various trends – far left militants, liberals, nationalists etc ... For the time being no leader has really emerged. The Russian middle class (made up of entrepreneurs, liberal professions, executives, who want to take part in political life and the State's

business) has invested greatly in the present protest movement. *"In the West the middle class is not revolutionary, but in Russia it is! Why? Because it is new, because it has just emerged, because it has a great deal of energy and because it wants to assert its rights and achieve a position. The development of civil society and the decline of the regime are two processes that are feeding off one another,"* stresses writer Boris Akunin who adds, *"if Vladimir Putin is elected, it will be due to fraud and he will be a weak president."*

The anti-Putin movements called for another demonstration under the banner *"big white circle"* on 26th February. Thousands of people bearing white ribbons (*Belatenta*), the colour of the protest movement, formed a human chain that was 16km long around the Sadovaya Koltso (the circle of gardens), the circular boulevard that extends 15.6km around the Kremlin, the official residence of the President of the Federation of Russia shouting *"Don't let Vladimir Putin back into the Kremlin."*

The day before thousands of people demonstrated in the country's second biggest town (and native city of United Russia's candidate) Saint Petersburg, with the watchword *"Russia without Putin"*. On 26th February a rally took place in the same town, notably on the call of the opposition party, Yabloko.

On 20th February last outgoing President Dmitri Medvedev met several opposition representatives. They declared that they were encouraged by the promises that had been made, notably with regard to support for greater participation by the parties opposed to the those in office in the next general elections. Vladimir Putin also said he intended to speak soon with the opposition leaders. *"We need to renew the mechanisms of our democracy which has to take on board increasing citizen participation. It is necessary to create a political system in which it will be possible and necessary to speak the truth;"* he declared. On 22nd February he stressed: *"a legal opposition is vital in our opinion but it is important that everything remains within the law and the Constitution."*

On 23rd February, a holiday in Russia devoted to those who defended the mother country, a celebration that remained after the end of the Soviet period, thousands of people met in the Lujniki Olympic Stadium in Moscow to *"defend the country"* and *"support Vladimir Putin"*. On this occasion United Russia's candidate stood as the saviour of motherland, Russia. *"We have come here to say that we love Russia and that we are ready to work for the good of our motherland, ready to defend it forever. We shall allow no one to impose anything on us,"* he declared. *"The battle for Russia continues, victory will be ours !"* he concluded, quoting

the poet Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841).

On 20th February Vladimir Putin wrote a column in the daily Komsomolskaya Pravda in which he made several promises: doubling of teachers' salaries over the next five years (to reach 200% of the average salary) and a 20% to 30% reduction in house prices. Ignoring the official statistics the outgoing Prime Minister announced a rise in Russia's population (up to 154 million in 2050, whilst the Rosstat Institute is forecasting a decline of 16 million inhabitants by 2031).

Two days later he published a text on the military question in the newspaper Rossiiskaia Gazeta in which he promised *"unprecedented rearmament"* (strengthening of the air and space defence system to a total of 23,000 billion roubles – 590 billion € - over ten years). *"We have to build a new, modern army that can mobilise at any time (...) the USA and NATO's policy in terms of anti-missile defence is pushing us towards this,"* writes Vladimir Putin who says he is convinced that *"the revival of the military-industrial machine will become the driver of development in various sectors ..."* It is not certain that the investment that concentrates on the system's traditional pillars (like the military industry and even raw materials) will enable the leader of United Russia to improve his image within the Russian population.

Apart from Vladimir Putin, four other people are running in the presidential election:

- Guennady Zyuganov, leader of the country's leading opposition party, the Communist Party (KPRF);
 - Vladimir Jirinovski, founder and leader of the ultra-nationalist and populist party, the Democratic Liberal Party (LDPR);
 - Serguey Mironov, former leader of Fair Russia (Spravedlivaya Rossiya, SR) and former chair of the Council of the Federation, the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament;
 - Mikhail Prokhorov, leader of the Juste Cause Party (Pravoe Delo, PD), a billionaire and businessman (believed by some to be the richest man in Russia; his fortune is estimated at 9.3 billion €), the head of an investment company Onexim and owner of the New Jersey (USA) basketball team, the Nets.
- Guennady Zyuganov and Serguey Mironov have both condemned the attitude adopted by the media in the electoral campaign for the presidential election, deploring the lack of air time that has been attributed to them, whilst the outgoing Prime Minister has enjoyed all of the media's attention. However both men and Mikhail Prokhorov recently took their distance with the popular anti-Putin movements warning against the *"orange pest"* (a reference to the Ukrainian revolution in 2004) which would pose a threat to Russia. Hostile

to the idea of organising a new round of general elections they have showed that they are reticent about relaxing the rules governing the registration of other political parties, since they are clearly scared by any possible competition.

Mikhail Prokhorov has signed an agreement with the League of Voters that focuses on the creation of a data base that registers the reports written by observers in the future presidential elections. Guennady Zyuganov and Serguey Mironov are due to ratify this text.

On 21st February last the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, the organisation that journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered in 2006, worked for, declared that it was experiencing cash-flow problems. The accounts of its co-owner Aleksander Lebedev (to a total of 49%, the other owner being former Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1985-1991), Mikhail Gorbachev) have been frozen after a tax control. The payment of salaries has been suspended for a month but *Novaya Gazeta* continues to be published.

Radio Moscow Echo announced a reshuffle in its executive. Gazprom, its main shareholder, dismissed two independent directors from the board and demanded the control over the decisions taken by the nine other members who sit on it. *"It is an attempt to adjust our editorial policy"* denounced the radio's editor in chief Alexey Venediktov. Finally the private TV channel Dojd which has been covering the opposition demonstrations since December 2011, announced that it was the focus of a financial investigation.

On 16th February last the European Parliament asked the Russian authorities to start dialogue with the opposition as quickly as possible. MEPs said they were concerned about the ban (that again damages political competition and pluralism) launched against some candidates, notably Grigori Yavlinski, founder of the Yabloko Party, preventing him from running in the presidential election (the electoral commission considered that at least 24% of the signatures that he had collated to stand in the election, were not valid).

The Minister for Emergencies, Serguey Choygu (ER) suggested that the candidates in the presidential election sign an agreement that plans for new methods in

the control of the counting of voting slips (including a second check on results transmitted via the copies of the reports of the committees in each electoral constituency and the filming of the voting results' reports). Serguey Mironov and Mikhail Prokhorov have both said they will sign a document whilst Vladimir Jirinovski and Guennady Zyuganov are against it.

According to the most recent poll by VTsIOM published on 19th February last, Vladimir Putin is due to be elected President of the Federation of Russia in the first round of the election with 58.6% of the vote. He is due to pull ahead of the Communist leader Guennady Zyuganov 14.8%, the ultra-nationalist Vladimir Jirinovski, 9.4%, Mikhail Prokhorov 8.7% and Serguey Mironov 7.7%. Mikhail Prokhorov is due to come second in the cities of Moscow and St Petersburg.

Vladimir Putin will therefore soon become President of the Federation of Russia, a post he had to give up in 2008. In spite of rising protest he is still the most popular and most credible politician in the country whose power no opposition candidate has succeeded in shaking.

And so nothing has changed in Russia and yet things are not really the same. The possibility of seeing the candidate in power being elected in the second round of voting has been forecast and the presidential election will take place under high security. Although Vladimir Putin is almost guaranteed to win a third term in office as head of Russia, he is facing an unprecedented opposition movement which leaves those in power vulnerable. During his future time as president he may not so easily be able to ignore the demands made by the Russian population; the authorities have already started to make proposals (return of direct universal suffrage to appoint regional governors; a better control by the State and citizens of public companies etc...) At the beginning of February Vladimir Putin also promised to make the oligarchs pay for the dishonest privatisations that were undertaken in the 1990's.

According to Richard Sakwa, professor of political science and a Russian specialist at the University of Kent in Canterbury, *"Vladimir Putin will not have to guarantee a free election but a free and honest presidency."*

RESULTS

Vladimir Putin wins back the presidency of the Federation of Russia

Unsurprisingly outgoing Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (United Russia ER) was elected in the first round as president of the Federation of Russia with 63.6% of the vote. Guenady Zyuganov (Communist Party- KPRF) came second with 17.18% of the vote. He is followed by Vladimir Jirinovski, who won 7.98% of the vote and businessman Mikhail Prokhorov (Just Cause, PD) who won 6.22%. Finally the former leader of Fair Russia (SR) Serguey Mironov won 3.85% of the vote. We should remember that the presidential mandate is now six years in Russia. Vladimir Putin will be head of State until 2018.

Nearly 2/3 of the Russians turned out to vote: 65.25%, which is slightly more than the figure recorded in the last presidential election on 2nd March 2008 (+ 1.47 points).

A great number of infringements were denounced, notably ballot stuffing, the massive transport of voters and various types of manipulation during vote counting. Communist Guenady Zyuganov spoke of a *"thieves' election, which was totally illegitimate, dishonest and opaque"*. After having voted he stressed that if Vladimir Putin won around 60% of the vote it would be proof that the vote had been rigged. *"Any reasonable person can understand that this is impossible without cheating, without stealing votes,"* he maintained.

The result, which had been expected, was not the real issue at stake in the Russian presidential election. Indeed uncertainty reigns over the nature of Vladimir Putin's third mandate as head of Russia. After the demonstrations that followed the general elections on 4th December last won by the party in office, United Russia, everyone wonders how the new president of the Federation will manage the discontent of the population that has emerged over the last few weeks, firstly in criticism over the electoral fraud, and then more widely in request of Vladimir Putin's departure.

During his electoral campaign the leader of United Russia promised everything to everyone, for example he announced the raising of teachers', doctors' and policemen's wages, the raising of pensions, student grants and family allowances, the increase of defence and police force budgets. However Russia has not been spared the international economic crisis. Gas and oil prices, which are some of the country's major resources, are decreasing, and Vladimir Putin will find it hard to raise public spending which already lies at 40% of the GDP.

To win the presidential election on 4th March the outgoing Prime Minister played his usual tune: the fear of a return to the chaos of the 1990's. Unusually he explained his programme, an all time first in Russian electoral history. The man, who is authoritarian and who has succeeded in eliminating all opposition over the last few years, places great worth on his varnish of legitimacy and struggles not to be compared to dicta-

tors like Aleksandr Lukashenka in Belarus or Bachar el Assad in Syria. From a political point of view he says he is ready to think about how to relax the laws governing the registration of political parties and has called for the restoration – under certain conditions – of the election of the regional governors – appointed by the government in office – which he abolished himself during his first mandate as head of the Federation of Russia (2000-2004). Finally United Russia's candidate promised to fight to counter corruption. *"Vladimir Putin cannot counter corruption. This would oblige him to cut into his entourage. Whilst his popularity is declining he will not wage war in his own camp,"* said political analyst Mark Urnov at the Higher School for Economy.

According to a poll undertaken by the Levada Centre and published at the end of December 2011, three quarters of the Russians (73%) said they were dissatisfied with the government policy. Russian society has transformed since Putin first took office 12 years ago. Some of the population has grown richer. Better educated it is now more demanding. The Russian middle class increasingly rejects the political game played by Mr Putin's men in which the economy only benefits the oligarchs. *"We are not moving towards stability but towards stagnation: the economy is not developing and the system is not effective,"* declares political analyst, Aleksandr Konovalov at the Institute for Strategic Expertise in Moscow. *"The hope or the illusion that a system like this, which is totally centralised and authoritarian, can guarantee stable economic development*

long term is slowly dying," indicates Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Centre. *"The next mandate could be a tragic one for Vladimir Putin. He will have to settle a great number of socio-economic issues and if he wants to settle them he may lose the support of his electorate,"* stresses Igor Bunin, head of the Centre for Political Technology in Moscow.

In the face of this situation Vladimir Putin has but one alternative: the repression of the demonstrations and the tightening of authoritarian trends and the closure of the regime or an opening up via reforms in a move towards pluralisation and decentralisation of the political arena. Although few analysts believe the imminence of a revolution in their country few also imagine that Putin's regime will last without reform.

After the presidential election (and even before the announcement of the results) many of Putin's supporters rallied in the Carousel Square near the Kremlin in Moscow to show their support to the new president

of the Federation. *"I promised you we would win. We have won. Glory to Russia!"* declared the new head of State who added *"we won an open, honest and impartial fight. Our voters know the difference between the desire for renewal and political provocation, whose aim it is to destroy our State. The Russian people have clearly pushed back attempts made by its enemies who tried to destroy the State and usurp power. Today the people have shown that scenario like this will not become a reality here. We have proven that no one can divide us and that no one can force anything upon us. Nothing and no one! They will not win! This presidential election was a test. We have won,"* declared Mr Putin. The opposition has called for a rally on 5th March in Lubyanka Square in Moscow, opposite the HQ of the Federal Security Service (FSB, formerly the KGB).

Vladimir Putin won the election on 4th March. Will he emerge victorious from his third term in office as head of the Federation of Russia?

Results of the Presidential Election on March 4th 2012 in Russia

Turnout: 65.25%

Candidates	No. of votes won	% of votes won
Vladimir Putin (United Russia, ER)	45 513 001	63.6
Guenady Zyuganov (Communist Party, KPRF)	12 288 624	17.18
Vladimir Jirinovski (Democratic Liberal Party, LDPR)	5 680 558	7.98
Sergueï Mironov (Fair Russia, SR)	4 448 959	6.22
Mikhaïl Prokhorov (Juste Cause, PD)	2 755 642	3.85

Source : Internet Site of the Central Electoral Commission of Russia (http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100031793509&vrn=100100031793505®ion=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100031793509&type=226)

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