

*In discussing Russian modernization disproportionately little is said about the political provision to carry out such modernization tasks, as formulated by the President of Russia. The current political system of the country has a number of significant disadvantages, which prevent the task of the country's development from being realized. **The preserved status quo in the Russian political system complicates modernization considerably.***

But how should the system be changed in order to stimulate the country's modernization and avoid large problems at the same time? There are opportunities for that. And this is what is discussed in the report, extracts from which are presented to you below.

*The report is prepared by the Political Criticism Guild, an informal association created by those who make political analysis professionally. The Guild was created on the initiative of Boris Mezhuev, Nikita Kurkin, and Alexey Cherniaev, who is the head of the association. **The goal of the Political Criticism Guild (PCG) is to rationalize the Russian political process and stir up political discussion.** The association undertakes an intellectual investigation that seeks to criticize the main political ideas in the discussion, and to pick out a rational point that can be used to improve the domestic political system.*

POLITICAL HEGEMONY OF THE MAJORITY

Report of the Political Criticism Guild

Modernization is the key topic in the political life of Russia today. There is an increasing struggle for the right to define what modernization is and how it should be carried out. Is the current political system able to provide modernization? Or is modernization impossible in Russia without systematic political reform? If this is the case, is such modernization going to be Westernized or original, authoritative, democratic, or something else entirely?

Illusion of technocracy and inevitability of politics

It is very popular in Russia to interpret modernization as a technical-economic project lacking a political dimension. This approach is tempting because of its simplicity: modernization is reduced to a set of socio-economic and technical tasks. The task of fulfilling them is entrusted to the politically neutral bureaucracy, the bearer of exclusive control, knowledge, and skills.

The outcome of "modernization without politics" is a system where the dominating bureaucracy is almost absolutely independent of public policy institutions. United Russia is considered to be the ruling party and has a consti-

tutional majority in the State Duma. But this party, despite having the majority of the country's votes, cannot form a government from its representatives. United Russia was not even able to force the resignation of Mikhail Zurabov, a very unpopular minister.

United Russia is often compared to the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party or the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party, which dominated in the political systems of their respective countries. But, contrary to these parties, United Russia does not form a national government and does not define its course. United Russia is not able to translate its majority voter support into the implementation and control of state policy.

A bureaucracy-centric political system was not able to modernize Russia over twenty years. This system can maintain a certain level of stability in the society, but it cannot solve the problems of the country's development. Preserved stability matches the corporate interests of the bureaucracy and leaves no incentive to continue plans of modernization. At the same time, the downsides of a bureaucratically dominant government is a high level of corruption, a low quality of manage-

ment, increasing estrangement of the population from the state, and a flourishing of apathy and immorality in public life. "Modernization without politics" has exhausted its resources.

False alternatives for political reform

Almost immediately after Dmitry Medvedev was proposed as a candidate for the Presidency, there emerged a debated over what should be the proper path towards political reform. So far, four major standpoints have taken shape about the direction of a potential transformation of the political system. Each viewpoint is held by certain circles of politicians and experts and has varying influence in society.

The radical democratic concept.

The supporters of this position see the Russian political system as an authoritarian regime.

The main objection to the regime is that the oppositional political forces have no real chance to come to power because of administrative pressure and consistent violation of the election rules. The followers of such opinions have advanced a slogan of 'Free Elections,' which consists in immediately adopting

free, honest, and truly competitive elections.

But the question remains: if this program of reform is realised, to what extent will it promote the country's modernization? One can hypothetically assume that various oppositional forces could create a situational coalition and win the elections atop a tide of populist criticism. However, this coalition would likely collapse soon after winning the elections due to the irreconcilable contradictions between its participants. Then **Russia would have a chaotic policy of temporary and unscrupulous political unions, similar to the current parliamentary crisis in Ukraine.**

The liberal elite concept.

Seeing that the real democratic solution to the problem of political modernization is delusive, high-ranking liberal officials in alliance with the business elite circles have been lobbying for a separate agreement between big business and bureaucracy beyond both the left-wing forces and the "majority party" since the first days of Dmitry Medvedev's Presidency. Such ideas were brought up extensively during the height of the economic crisis of 2008-2009 through the central mouthpiece of the "elite liberals," the Institute of Modern Development (INSOR).

The supporters of this concept seek liberalization without democratization. They understand that full-scale democratization will strengthen the position of the communists, nationalists, and other protest forces, but not of the liberals. This concept of political reform is aimed not at the transformation of the political system, but at transferring key positions within it into the hands of the representatives of the westernized bureaucratic coalition, liberal intelligentsia, and big business. Essentially, the elite liberal concept hopes for a return to the structure of 'mature Yeltsinism' of 1993-1998, fortified by the weakening Communist Party of the Russian Federation and regional elites.

Since political support for these '1990s liberals' by society and even within the elite is severely limited, such political changes could only come about by way of the Presidential power structure.

The elite liberal concept substitutes the political goals of modernization. The followers of the model in question deliberately or unconsciously strive to narrow the social basis of the political system unreasonably and dramatically rather than create public consensus in the case of modernization. Instead of seeking to raise the efficiency of the state, President Medvedev receives offers to solve the problem of power and propriety redistribution in favour of minority interest groups. The price for this process would most certainly reveal itself in the erosion of the President's power, and the disappearance of any modernization plans.

The preservation of the status quo.

This standpoint is explicitly expressed in a number of texts by publicists who are loyal to the regime. From their point of view, the current state of the political system is almost optimal. Only a set of minor improvements would be permissible. Among such measures would be a partial rotation of the heads of executive and legislative authority within the territorial subjects of the Russian Federation; the inclusion of primary elections within United Russia when defining the party leadership candidates at all levels; and



compulsory participation of the majority party's representatives in public debates. The status quo concept essentially ignores any discussion of serious political reform.

The arguments put forward by the followers of such ideas merely refer to the political stability achieved within the scope of the current system, the high rating of the leadership and electoral success of United Russia. **President Dmitry Medvedev has essentially rejected this status quo concept, calling constant attention to the need for political reform.**

This standpoint does not claim to be everlasting. During 2010-2011 the leaders of the country will have to define a candidate for the 2012 presidential elections. This decision – whatever the outcome – is going to inevitably change the layout of the political system and take away from the current status quo.

The mobilization of authority.

In the circles of publicists and perhaps some members of the elite, there is a very popular viewpoint that there can be no modernization of Russia without a shift to a 'dictatorship of development.' Their view is offered as

a particular way of shifting towards an increase in constitutional restrictions of the president powers.

We think that **there is no political subject for a 'dictatorship of development' in modern Russia.** Decades ago, certain hopes were placed on the people from the force structures, but they were not justified. The force part of the elite has long taken offices in the state machinery.

The dominating political power in Russia are those neo-patrimonial bureaucracy groups closely co-operating with big business and faintly dependent on the political control from the top and from the bottom. The 'dictatorship of development' project might be realized if backed by these groups. But in the present political system the bureaucracy is first of all busy with gaining economic profits from its standing. It is interested in preserving its stability rather than the growth of state efficiency. It is obvious that a 'dictatorship of development' would not last very long in such conditions.

In summarizing all of the above concepts, we can only draw some disconcerting conclusions. **In Russian society, only those concepts of political reform are widespread which bear no significant constructive potential.** The political projects under discussion do not contain any real way to improve the efficiency of state control. They virtually substitute other priorities for the task of Russia's modernization that was suggested by President Medvedev. This reason is enough to conclude that the examined concepts will not be able to promote modernization, and that's a guarantee.

Political hegemony of the majority

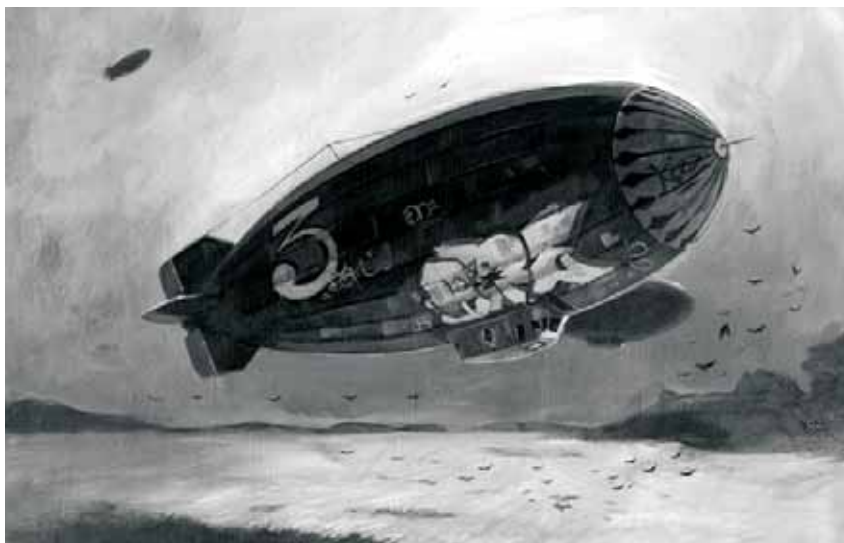
The authors of the text agree that it is still possible to create a realistic concept that will become the ideological basis to fulfill the President's task of political reform. The concept of political hegemony of the majority

involves first of all active co-operation of the President, the majority party, and the forces of constructive opposition.

The goal of cooperation is a step-by-step and non-catastrophic transformation of the current political system, which has played its positive historical role but obviously cannot cope with the current task of modernization.

The key idea of the stated concept is to pass the power from the

ities of the bureaucracy by means of public policy institutions. The international experience shows that **one of the most effective tools to solve the task of political modernization is a political party supported by the majority.** In this case, to counterbalance the bureaucracy they should do nothing more than give wider powers to the bodies of legislative authorities in order to give United Russia a chance to make



dominant bureaucracy over to that force which is supported by the majority of citizens. This concept is called the '**political hegemony of the majority.**' At the moment, United Russia is that force, supported as it was by the majority of active Russian voters during elections at the regional and federal levels.

United Russia has positively contributed to political stability. Throughout the entire post-Soviet period there was no structure in Russia able to mobilize the electorate more effectively to support the authorities. In the State Duma, United Russia consolidated the parliamentary majority; it helped the Lower chamber to work more productively in its lawmaking. United Russia has done a lot to restrain the particularism of the regional elites and to integrate them into the national political system.

The political reform designed to secure the success of modernization is based on the idea of systematic control over the activ-

key political decisions and have them fulfilled by the state machinery.

But the mechanical implementation of such a recipe in Russia right now would be impossible. **In such a bureaucracy-centric political system the leading party of United Russia is an all-Russian bureaucratic coalition.** So it is not enough to mechanically widen the powers of Parliament, which controls United Russia, to merely create political counterbalances to a dominant bureaucracy. Such a simple solution will only result in preserving the current state of things, just in a slightly different form. United Russia can be used as a successful counterbalance to bureaucracy and as a tool for political control only if it debureaucratizes itself. Therefore, **the agenda of political reform includes two interrelated directions: to increase the influence of United Russia within the political system and simultaneously to politicize and debureaucratize the party itself.**

The tools for political reform

1) A Modernization pact is the basis of reform.

To make a political reform means to achieve a consensus between the President, the majority party led by the head of the government, and the constructive opposition. A Modernization pact can be used in order to establish such a consensus.

The consensus is based on its participants' interest in Russia's modernization as well as their common values, such as Russian sovereignty, its territorial integrity, devotion to fair political competition, and the encouragement of Russia's global influence. At its core, the Modernization pact is not an abstract social contract of everybody with everybody, but an agreement about the specific conditions of political reform.

The Modernization pact secured the consensus that the matters of the state course should be determined by public policy, the institutions of which (the parliament and parties) are under citizens' control determined by elections and limited by legal bodies.

The pact implies that the Cabinet of Ministers would be formed by the majority of the State Duma, i.e. United Russia would hold control over the composition and course of the government. At the same time, the pact involves a number of measures guaranteeing honest political competition and increasing the influence of public policy in state activity.

The notion of the Modernization pact could be put forward by the constructive opposition, addressing the President of Russia on behalf of society and being guided by the notion of modernization advanced by him. But the initiative to sign the Modernization pact as a vehicle for change can only originate from the President of Russia.

2) Forming the government of Russia by the majority party

It is necessary to shift the center of key decision making to the leading political party, which is

connected to the society legitimately through elections. Increasing the political role of United Russia involves certain changes in legislation to widen the functions of the legislative authorities. First of all, we are speaking about a shift to the principle of a Cabinet of Ministers' formed by the parliament majority. This principle would result in the creation of a government formed by members of United Russia, the majority party. It is necessary to increase the responsibility of the government in the State Duma, i.e. to simplify the non-confidence vote procedure and to introduce the impeachment procedure for some ministers.

After creating its own government, **United Russia would turn from a majority party with limited influence on the executive authorities, into a real ruling party.** It would have an opportunity to carry out the policy that it chooses itself. Thus, the paradox that sometimes arises, where the ruling party has to sharply oppose this or that minister, would vanish.

3) New balance of political forces

Simultaneous to increasing the political role of United Russia, a new balance of political forces must be created in order to stimulate the majority party to work on behalf of a program of modernization.

The components of this balance must include the following:

1. The President of Russia should perform the function of a non-partisan arbiter.

Strong, non-partisan presidential power is the major guarantee that political reform will not be distorted in its realization. When shifting to a government formed by the parliament majority, the political resources, which gave the President of Russia a constitutional design of a super-presidential republic, will be of great importance.

2. United Russia should be de-bureaucratized and politicized.

A set of practical steps for de-bureaucratization will allow United Russia in the future to turn from a bureaucracy coalition enjoying the support of the majority into the party having direct communication with the majority.

3. A systemic opposition should be created for the UR, i.e. a party of national development.

Parties and movements of traditional opposition have long turned into niche forces unable to significantly influence the national political agenda. They cannot compete with United Russia due to administrative pressure and their own weakness. There is a need for a new party to succeed, that is, **a party of national development**, capable of becoming the political vanguard of modernization.

The minimum program of this party would be to achieve institutional changes in the political system, first of all a shift to a government that is responsible to the legislative authorities. A national development party could come to power in the future if the current United Russia turns from the 'ruling party' into the actual ruling party. Reform to the political system will give a chance for a national development party to become a systemic and actual opposition to the UR.

4) Safeguarding fair political competition.

Safeguarding fair political competition for the ruling party and the opposition is one of the key factors to stimulate United Russia towards the good of modernization. First and foremost, if there is no guarantee of fair competition in elections, then the ruling party will be of little help to fulfill the task laid out by the President of Russia. Without the guarantees of fair competition, a new oppositional party will not be able to play its role either; it will be doomed to remain nothing more than a political club. ■

The complete version of the report is at www.russ.ru