

THE PROTECTIVE PLURALISM OF THE RULING POWER

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The past year was characterised by debates initiated by the support team of the current government. Within the notion that is called "protectiveness" and invokes something for "Putin's majority", there emerged a wide pluralistic range of opinions. Grouped around the United Russia party, this concept is almost separate from any influence on the part of opposition parties. In this issue of the Russian Journal, we are putting forward a notion of a new "protective pluralism" by making room for the voices of party members and its associated experts. The case is not about its strength, but rather about the symptoms and signs therein.

Is the "protector" still conservative?

How should we talk about pluralism, regarding a party that is considered to be an inactive instrument of power, an instrument of the very party that proclaimed its ideology to be "conservatism"? On these grounds, some people pit United Russia against Dmitry Medvedev and his modernisation policy, while others seek to "save face" by using safe wording like "conservative modernisation". However, when conservatives go the length to introduce modernisation, this does not necessarily mean that the modernisation itself is conservative. Conservatism in Russia is linked

with a historical experience that is based on opposition to violence and blood. It can be granted with the only reasonable excuse — **the exclusion of a repeated blow to a broken nation — with a taboo placed on slavery and a taboo on blood.** Without this, there would be no sense in Russian conservatism and it would all be hot air.

The concept of a non-violent modernisation is well justified — economically, technologically and geopolitically. But, above all, this is a bid for leadership. When Medvedev speaks on behalf of the "absolute majority" of the people, he is not speaking from the position of a sociologist, but as a morally-grounded leader. His stronghold is **the moral, value-laden majority, which also practically lays claim to political sovereignty.** In Russian political culture, sovereignty indicates a personal independence in connection with one of a national nature. Sovereign democracy, as a choice made in favour of freedom and based on independent statehood, constitutes the principle of political sovereignty of a personality. It rejects any claims of people or legal instances, as well as ruling over thoughts, faith and the personal free choice of individuals.

President Medvedev does not only want to overcome backwardness — with the root of backwardness seen by him as a combination of violence, lawlessness, nihilism — components of a slave complex. **Medvedev doesn't want to be a president of slaves.** In refusing to become "a president of slaves", he has following in suit with Putin's impulse — a pathos of national opposition. Putin's first presidency was exactly a national insurrection — it was a struggle for both the independence and national dignity of Russia. Medvedev emphasises the same ardour that Putin showed, only translating this into more of an ideological key. The ideology, which remains to be fully shaped, is already altering the existing political atmosphere.

A "liberal empire": president-patron plus service maintenance

Opposition to the idea of the ruling party is based on a democratic-tsarist ideologeme. Such a concept requires that the beloved president proceed to rule like a tsar-patron — like a democratic tsar who is unconstrained either by party or by anything else. The same advice was previously given to Yeltsin, ultimately overloading him with impractical emergency powers. Conceptually, **"demonarchism" is an apology for "unipolar" policy, a policy of the so-called "action directe", a policy of direct coercive commands.** According to such a model, the president finds himself in the position of a patron among leading elites, a thin layer floating on the surface of those clan holders holding the resources — both administrative and other kinds. Such a "creative nano-minority" can attain salvation by doing indispensable favours for members of the elite. Under such circumstances, the leader of such a minority becomes its hostage, much like a service centre for the policy of others.

There is much speculation to the effect that there's a need to get rid of "such a party". It is inactive, weakly governed, and seemingly primitive. Such ideas are just as simple as they are stupid.

Loyalty on the part of the government authorities does not necessarily mean that the party, which includes practically the entire personnel at the level of executive power, does not also influence that power itself. **The party virtually assumed the Medvedev-Putin tandem as an institution and adopted the relevant rules.** As well, this tandem is a formula for a definite public policy, a formula for public pluralism. The party has pulled together with this mechanism. It has adjusted and learned to work according to new rules. That means, that the party is also compatible with a definite level of pluralism in the powers that be. *Having become free of the party of the*

majority, the leader would effectively remain alone with a line of forceful monopolies. Having pushed “the party of majority” out of the political game, the president would be left face to face with forces that he would be unable to control. Politics will deteriorate in the hands of predatory lobbies – financial-economic, paramilitary, para-security forces, and the regional lobby. This does not mean that today the ruling party is in control here, though the party does serve to constrain such forces.

The United Russia Party is a system comparable to a zero reading (prior to the first reading), not only in the process of correcting draft laws, but also in correcting the way that the country is being ruled. While President Medvedev decides whether he actually needs a party and, if so, exactly which party he needs, he is already using the United Russia party as his stronghold – **in accordance with his style of ruling**. If he is unable to change his course and activate the ruling party in line with his “new strategy” (inevitably, involving other parties), it may be the case that there is nothing left for him, but to present his alternative version of power politics (it is highly possible) – otherwise, he will lose.

Party politics as a substitute for power politics?

Power politics and forceful manoeuvring are well-developed, and they are often comfortably packaged in a way that they appeal to one’s national consciousness. They are easy to understand, conveniently managed, and often effective. They are not at all rude – the use of force is flexibly diversified among the regions and social groups, and it always takes into account the opposition of communities and other features. However, if we still want something different, it is important to operate a rather complicated, national, vertically integrated, diversified mechanism. At the time, we have only one like that – this is a party, the party of the majority.

Here the task of creating United Russia as ruling party becomes inevitable for President Medvedev. The paradox is, that as a party that is an appendage of power or “a handsaw and a spade”, according to a state-

ment actually made by Vitaliy Ivanov, it is essentially pushed outside of the framework of the Medvedev-Putin tandem. If the tandem is developed within the realm of executive power, then **it remains somewhat unfinished in the public policy sphere**. It functions wonderfully in all spheres **with the exception of the political party**, which remains the domain of Vladimir Putin. For the first time, Medvedev touched that domain (very carefully) last autumn during the convention of United Russia. The party may become the ruling party only in the case that Medvedev and Putin make special common efforts.

The President talks about a **constitutional conversion of power** – about returning it from the fuzzy, usurped condition to safely standardised state rules and institutions. This agenda was established by Putin early into his presidency, and he never subsequently tried to revise it. This is exactly the agenda of Putin’s majority, not an imaginary “social paternalism” or “psychology of slaves” that has been unsuccessful for decades and ascribed to by Russian voters.

An alternative to the majority?

One way or another, the policy introduced in 2010 will be played out on the stage of Putin’s majority. The important question is whether **Putin’s “majority” and “Medvedev’s minorities” are really different communities, as it is widely accepted?** Is it true that the political community of United Russia is an absolutely different “monotonous and one-dimensional” community in comparison with communities involving the intelligentsia?

Medvedev is moving in line with reality; he is not combining something heterogeneous, but rather admits that, in fact, he is focused on the pluralism of the majority. Meanwhile, the model of majority has also changed. What does it mean when Olga Kryshtanovskaya, a renowned specialist on elites, and musician Igor Butman join the United Russia party? What it means is that the majority is restoring the minorities that it previously lost. **Medvedev’s policy of involving minorities – and forcing the ruling party to engaged in dialogue with them – is becoming part of a real**

ongoing process of national consolidation.

The policy of inclusiveness corresponds to a new phase with respect to the dynamics of Putin’s majority, within which there are numerous communities and minorities. What Medvedev is doing is just legalising the real circumstances and modifying existing policy as it is needed. He is removing the obstacles that exist inside this impetuously consolidating nation.

The current indicators with respect to Putin’s level of support tend to underestimate the potential of the majority. Indicators about the population’s trust in Putin and the high electoral rating of United Russia – they are not at their maximum points due to the fact that they are not exclusive. **Putin’s majority had become inclusive before Medvedev proceeded to adopt his policy of involving minorities.** As a result, it is actually expanding, rather than falling into pieces. While this expansion of the Russian universe looks like a cosmological scheme of Big Bang, the Big Bang will hardly happen once again.

That is the reason why it has become difficult to stop Medvedev. His doctrinal verve is creating new policy frameworks. A leader of a free people cannot force them to adopt the rules of slavery, whether it be voluntarily or on a paid basis. Thus emerges a process resembling an ethically-based snowball effect, which requires the conversion of models. Putin’s model of Russia as a sovereign free political nation itself is in need of that.

By making the United Russia party follow a policy of arrangements with the opposition in various senses, President Medvedev is essentially forcing the party in power to become a ruling party. While public policy is still undeveloped, the opposition parties still play somewhat of a role in activating the hormones of the United Russia party. Soon after the autumn elections, a new role for “political starters” was laid out. Now, after the conclusion of the State Council’s work, this should start shaping up into a definite scheme of interaction between the president, the ruling party, the opposition party(ies), and local governmental authorities. ■