

## PROTECTORS: PLURALISM OF LOYALIST THOUGHT

*In Russian society (and far beyond its borders) there exists the opinion that political theorists who advocate loyalty to political power represent an ideologically indistinguishable crowd, who are characterised by exclusive loyalty to governmental authorities.*

*This idea is absolutely false. On the contrary, inside this political school, the existing range of opinions about how Russian power should look is even wider than encountered in leftist circles and or those of the liberal opposition.*

*The editorial staff of Russian Journal-Topic of the Week presents its readers with a broad palette of such "protective positions". These positions stem from supporters of the "Ideals for 2007" which marked the conclusion of Vladimir Putin's second term. With respect to how to proceed in advancing these ideals, discussion has not yet resulted in the formation of a consensus opinion. One writer (Vitaliy Ivanov) believes that nothing should be changed from this ideal. This idea differs from that held by another writer (Artyom Akonpyan), who believes that turning United Russia into a capable ruling party will become a guarantee of the "Course for 2007" by allowing it to continue functioning under new circumstances. A more "progressive" opinion is also heterogeneous. This edition of the Russian Journal presents readers an insight into the United Russia party through a series of exclusive articles and interviews.*

## UNITED RUSSIA — THE PATH OF THE RULING PARTY

Dmitriy Yuriev



### Prehistory

There was absolutely no chance for a proper political party system to emerge after the disintegration of the USSR. First the "democrats" from Yeltsin's era skirted away from any serious party-building as if they had seen a "phantom of communism". The solution to a complete lack of parties as a mechanism of representing the political will of particular segments or groups of the population was eventually introduced in 1993 through the introduction of "party lists". This short-lived policy tried to accommodate differing groups and interests without first establishing parties. This policy produced a series of fly-by-night political parties, abbreviation parties (e.g. Yabloko) and parties created with the purpose of retaining power (e.g. Nash Dom Rossia). They were all completely dependent on the

administrative resources of the government. The result of this policy was called a "pre-electoral Babylonian lottery" when in 1995, a four-paged ballot-paper included 43 party-lists, and the seats in the Russian Parliament were shared by only four parties. These four parties, taken together, did not even represent the majority of voters.

All of the political reforms made at the beginning of 2000 were aimed at returning to a functional party-system. **Pre-electoral parties or virtual "sock-puppets" lost their right to exist.** The obvious path to ensure that parties could functionally represent the different interests of Russian society was to organise parties through direct and organised state control.

Today, the political potential of United Russia — the only developing and relevant party in the country — is a main resource for political modernisation. United Russia's ideology of "conservatism" appears to be a very successful self-identification. The conservatism of United Russia serves as alternative — not an alternative to progress (because in such an approach, United Russia has nothing at all against progress), but an alternative to regression. This is not a form of "preservation" that we are discussing here.

### *On the way to obtaining status as the ruling party*

A goal of United Russia holds the objective of bringing the process of the

"partisation of power" through to fruition. This process aims to turn United Russia into a fundamental pillar of nation-building. This party-driven process presents an alternative to the opaque, oligarch dominated process that has caused the stagnation and corruption of modern day Russia. **Paradoxically, the "oligarchs" and "administrative paper-pushers" currently active under the current administration are becoming a kind of non-systemic opposition, claiming to represent a distinct counter-elite sentiment.** In this context, the latter group (the "siloviki") and fringe groups are united by their inability to build their position on the opinion of the majority, to consolidate public sentiment, or to develop their policy in accordance with these factors.

The only possible way to produce an effective multiparty political system is to base it on a real functioning political system, which is today represented only by the United Russia party. I believe that **a real alternative to United Russia will someday emerge, stemming from the basis of this same party.** The creators of Russia's multiparty system should be on the lookout for exactly this trend. ■

*Exclusively for RJ*

DMITRIY YURIEV

is a Russian political theorist, publicist, and writer. He serves as the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Saint Petersburg Branch of United Russia.