

UNITED RUSSIA IS A PURELY INSTRUMENTAL PARTY

Vitaliy Ivanov



VITALIY IVANOV

is a legal scholar, political theorist, and publicist. He is the Director of the Institute for Politics and Public Law and a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. He is the author of the book "United Russia. Brief History of the Party" (Moscow, Europa Publishing House, 2009)

RJ Dear Vitaliy Vyacheslavovich, how do you view the role and the importance of United Russia in the political system? Can we say that United Russia's political power is independent?

Clearly, United Russia is not playing and, by its nature, is unable to play any independent role. **United Russia is an instrument of the current presidential and executive power.** It has always existed, it exists now, and is able to exist only as an instrument. All talk about its ability to acquire any independent authority or to become "the third part of the tandem" is simply absurd.

Moreover, **I am totally against characterising United Russia as a ruling party. A ruling party is a subject party, while United Russia is an instrumental party.** It can only be characterised as the party of power.

A ruling party is a collective political entity, which managed to gain power as a result of elections or power that was seized by force. On the other hand, a party of power is a party created by an existing political power to undertake its political tasks. United Russia is probably the most classical case among all the existing and previous parties of power. It is senseless and useless for the party to attempt to change its nature.

United Russia shall remain a party of power. If we start to invent new missions for the party, like sending it on a wild goose chase, no good can come from such an initiative. It is unlikely that such exercises will help United Russia to better cope with the tasks it was designed to perform.

An example of tasks they could perform better including winning the elections in the regions. Who can seriously say, that if United Russia were to be engaged in useless activities, such as debates, that it would start working better during regional elections?

It is an understandable desire to create a more "European" political system. But an irrepressible realisation of this desire can destroy the mechanisms that have, at the very least, been working since 2005–2006. If I may say, I am a supporter of United Russia's preservation in the form in which the party has existed since 2005. **United Russia's golden age, which should have been longer, was between 2005 and 2007.** After 2007, the unexplainable experiments began, as I see it, and they may lead a functioning party to become dysfunctional or unbalanced.

In order to create a ruling party, one must completely turn the entire political system inside out. Who needs this? The answer is that nobody does, even though I am willing to play the game. So let's call our party of power a ruling party — long live the party!

RJ What do you think about the fact that United Russia has declared itself to be a conservative party?

I'm surprised about the timing of this statement. United Russia claims that it has just recently proclaimed itself to be a conservative party. I take responsibility in declaring that the concept of United Russia as a conservative party was committed to writing back in 2003. I can't see any breakthrough in the announcement that was made at the party's recent convention.

RJ Can such a public ideological self-identification serve to narrow the electoral base of United Russia?

No. The overwhelming majority of the population knows nothing about the ideological positioning of United Russia. They know that this is Putin's party and that is all they know. And that's enough for them.

The main question here is not about ideology; it's about who they should vote for. The choice is ultimately whether to vote for the incumbent power or against it. When the forces that be satisfy the people, it will receive the popular vote, no matter how those authorities might describe themselves. If the party in power wants to be conservative, let them be conservative. If they call themselves liberals, let them be liberals.

RJ Can United Russia become an engine for the transformation and development of the country?

How do you expect a handsaw or a spade to become an engine? Russia's engine is a tandem which involves the President, the Prime Minister and their respective offices. We don't have any other engine, we have never had them in the past, and we will not have any in the foreseeable future. Any talk about anything else is essentially irrational and senseless speculation. ■

Vitaliy Ivanov was speaking to
Liubov Ulianova