

# No 'CONSERVATIVE MODERNISATION'!

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*RJ* Dear Olga Viktorovna, how would you depict the role and importance of the United Russia party in the political power structure? Can the party become a stable check and balance to the President and the Prime Minister in the struggle for political influence?

At present, political parties tend to act as an overarching control mechanism. Our President controls numerous offices, but has no direct party links that could allow for working directly with the citizens instead of with institutions. This is in spite of the fact that parties play a large role in our political system. The role of political parties is key when it comes to personnel and patronage. Currently our political institutions at the regional and local levels are being staffed directly as a result of political party nominations. It is to be expected that the fact that he doesn't head his own party limits the president's chances to induce a similarly increase in his influence and legitimacy. While the political backing of Vladimir Putin is absolutely apparent, the political backing of Dmitry Medvedev remains unclear.

In order to increase his political influence under the current circumstances, Medvedev should head some political party.

*RJ* During its December convention, United Russia declared itself to be a conservative party. Can we then consider the Russian government to be conservative as well?

Indeed, here we can see some contradictions. The government policy is one rooted in modernisation. Putin is trying to modernise the economy. In this context, **United Russia's declaration as being a party of conservatives creates a logical contradiction to the course that is being taken by the government.** Conservatism is an ideology of preserving the existing order of things within society. On the other hand, modernisation is an ideology that is absolutely opposed, as it breaks the existing order of things, changes them and develops them.

We hear pundits using sophistry when they say that "conservative modernisation" exists. It is likely that the conservatism that is suggested by the party is not a real full-fledged ideology, but something like an anti-revolutionary method. In this context, conservatism can be accepted, keeping in mind, that there's no need to break the existing system by revolution, while there is a need for its development through evolution.

*RJ* Is it fair to say that the party in power and the ruling party are not the same things?

**We should ask ourselves a very necessary question. Namely, who rules Russia today?** Previously it was clear that the Kremlin ruled. In a system with one central power base and a mono-centric system, United Russia could occupy a seat in such a hierarchy only by complying with decisions taken at a higher level. In this context the party is ruling, as it is built as the structure of a ruling party elite. The party in this situation should not be seen as an initiator of political processes, but rather as a soldier that executes orders. In today's Russia, some ideas originate from Putin and are developed through the White House, while

others come from Kremlin. That's why **United Russia possesses much more freedom than other parties previously had under the traditional one-party hierarchy.** The freedom to operate means the freedom of manoeuvre, which allows more space for initiative and creative work. We should make use of this situation.

*RJ* What do you think of the power politics approach taken by United Russia?

If we talk about conservative ideology and search for a carrier of such an ideology within our society, then we should, first of all, say that the subjects of such ideology are the "siloviki" (civil servants of the power ministries). **The "siloviki" are at the centre of Russian conservative thinking.** I would say that the fact that United Russia has accepted this ideology is largely due to the great influence of "siloviki" inside the party. I don't mean their skills or the resources that they can muster up, I mean "siloviki" as the people who wield strong influence within the party.

This relationship in regards to administrative resources creates yet other problems. As a result of the intertwining between the party and the state, the party doesn't have any resources other than those that are administrative and governmental. Instead, the party could search for a charismatic leader and work directly with the people. However, in fact, there is no need to do that. The membership of the party would oppose such an approach. One main reason for this is that the administrative resources available for such a move are limited. This is why the party is perceived by society to be a party of bureaucrats. As a result, it turns out that *the bureaucrats that present just 2% of the population end up capturing 70% of the votes in legislatures at all levels.*

**This is all too much. This will also not be good for United Russia.** There exists a need to create bold initiatives inside the party, to develop real discussion between its members, to create factions, to increase competition within the party. It is possible that this evolution could very well be the modernisation of the ruling party. ■

*Olga Kryshstanovskaya was speaking to Liubov Ulianova*