

PLACING HOPES ON MEDVEDEV HAS BEEN JUSTIFIED

Dmitry Muratov



DMITRY MURATOV – a Russian journalist and the Editor-in-chief of the 'Novaya Gazeta' (New Newspaper)

■ *Dear Mr. Muratov, do you think it is possible to figuratively divide what is a unified Russian society into two separate groups - a reactionist party and a party of progress?*

Indeed, there really are two parties today. Those who may be called the reactionist party are, in fact, the Soviet and post-Soviet majority, which is so dear to me. Figuratively speaking, it can be called 'the party of TV-watchers'. It is confronted today by 'the party of Internet-users'. **The former group is static, while the latter one is dynamic. The former group is reactionary, while the latter one is progressive.** It is the latter party that has introduced many of the projects that are now doing a lot of good for the country, from supporting children through housing developments and bases for the homeless through to the holding of elections for and Internet parliament and introducing discussions on topical issues. It is 'the party of Internet-users', or the web-people of Russia, as we can call them, which is fulfilling its public duty, which any social activity in our country should be aimed at doing.

■ *But the sphere of competence of this 'party of Internet-users' is quite limited. Is this web society able to go beyond the framework of the Internet?*

It is not justified to think that the web society, public opinion, newspapers, or working with this audience are moves that are not capable of doing anything. Public opinion influences much the authorities' decision-making process. And this public opinion tends to be formed thanks to the activities of high-quality mass media consumers and Internet-users. From the decision to hang that infamous watch bell in a distant village during last year's wild fires to the decision to form a committee to investigate 'the Magnitsky case' and the activities of the public committee regarding YUKOS – all of this is the result of public opinion influencing the authorities. In this respect, it can be said that public opinion itself was formed by Internet-users, this 'party of web-users', rather than by the State Duma, which is only capable of signing outrageous bills.

So it can be stated that public opinion really exists, that it is leading us to act and that no sensible authorities would refuse to co-operate with this public opinion. Otherwise, government authorities might otherwise just cease to exist. One recent example of this is the attempt of some deputies from the State Duma to push through a draft bill allowing the government to conscript students for military service. After the uproar started by 'the party of web-users', these unfortunate deputies immediately apologised, stating that their intentions had been rather different.

■ *So do you think that the hopes of the country's modernisation are somewhat linked less to the state and more to this figurative 'party of web-users'?*

I hold no illusions concerning the Russian political elite. At the present moment, it is experiencing a kind of uncertainty. The 'tandem' itself still

cannot find its position. The elite, who are in such a situation, can hardly be trusted. That is why all my interests relate to society, which, as I can see, is fulfilling its undertakings noteworthy.

At the same time, it should be also stated that the modern Russian authorities are coming into greater contacts with society. When the newspaper I work for address representatives of the authorities, such state bodies have recently started to provide answers in an irreproachable, exact, and timely manner. Government authorities know that it is necessary to not only observe the law, but also adequately convey the idea behind its actions to the public. Otherwise, the government will end up losing its legitimacy once and for all.

■ *You have met with President Dmitry Medvedev. After three years of his role as the president, do you still pin your hopes on him?*

I have to admit that there has been several moves that he has made that I very much support. These include his recent initiatives in the field of disarmament, the privatisation of public corporations, the dismissal of officials from the board of directors of various public companies, and instructions concerning the YUKOS case and the 'Magnitsky case', his intention to disallow the military from conscripting simply anybody who can walk and talk, and his amendments to provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code concerning business activity. These measures have only won support from our newspaper's staff and myself. I see that indeed, **the pen with which the President signs bills does not tremble and the number of officials, police generals, security service generals who badly needed to be removed from offices they held, has decreased dramatically.** All of this allows us to say that much of the hope we have pinned on Medvedev has already been justified. ■

Dmitry Uzlander exclusively for the Yaroslavl Forum