

European  
Elections monitorfrom **Corinne Deloy**  
translated by Helen Levy

## RESULTS

# The Ruling Party, United Russia, wins the general elections but is clearly in decline

The ruling party, United Russia (ER) won the general elections on 4th December in Russia. The party led by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin won 49.54% of the vote and 238 seats in the Duma, the lower chamber of Parliament (-77 in comparison with the previous election on 2nd December 2007). United Russia maintains the absolute majority but has lost its 2/3 majority, which made it possible to modify the constitution without having to convince the other parties in Parliament.

It beat the Communist Party (KPRF), the leading opposition party, led by Guenady Zyuganov, which won 19.2% of the vote (92 seats, + 35), Fair Russia (SR) led by Nikolay Levichev, 13.20% of the vote (64 seats, + 26) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), led by Vladimir Jirinovski, 11.40% of the vote (56 seats, + 16).

As forecast by the polls only four parties will be represented in the new Duma.

The liberal party, Yabloko led by Alexey Mitrokhin did however win the majority of votes cast by Russian citizens living in the west. It came out ahead in the USA, France and the UK and second (behind United Russia) in Italy.

Turnout was slightly below that recorded in the last general elections on 2nd December 2007 and lay at 60.2% i.e. -3.51 points.

*"This is an optimal result that reflects the real situation in the country. Using this result as a base we can guarantee stable development,"* said Vladimir Putin happily. *"This is democracy in motion. It was said that the party would and retain its dominant position by using ploys but it has been proven that it has the moral right to continue on the path we have chosen. United Russia will be obliged to govern in coalition with the other parties on certain issues and this is quite normal, this is parliamentarianism and democracy,"* maintained Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. *"We hope that we shall win a majority in the Duma,"* stressed the leader of the Duma, Boris Gryzlov (ER).

The Communist Party rejected the offer of a coalition issued by United Russia whereas Fair Russia has not ruled this out if the communists take part. The Liberal Democratic Party also accepted, on condition that it would take part on an equal footing with United Russia.

Communist MP Serguey Obukov said: *"Russia now has a new political reality even if they re-write everything."* *"These general elections are unpreceden-*

*ted because they took place to the back drop of a decline in confidence in Vladimir Putin, Dmitri Medvedev and the ruling party"* indicates liberal Vladimir Rijkov who added, *"I think that the presidential election in March next will lead to a major political crisis because of the disappointment, frustration and disenchantment of the people – it will lead to an even greater protest vote."*

According to political expert, Kirill Rogov, *"the weak support for United Russia is an undeniable fact, which, moreover, is simply intensifying."* *"We have a totally personalised political system. The regime draws all of its legitimacy from Vladimir Putin's popularity. As a result this electoral decline is a serious threat to the stability of the system"* declared Lev Gudkov, director of the pollster Levada, just days before the election.

United Russia's decline was expected but its extent surprised political observers. The emerging Russian middle class seems increasingly doubtful about the tandem, comprising Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev and its ability to modernise the country. As for the poorest Russians they are disappointed and

are suffering the economic crisis more and more. Some of them did not hesitate to turn to the Communist Party which promised *"to give them back what has been stolen"* and suggested an increase in education spending, to nationalise several companies and to introduce free healthcare.

The election was marred by multiple incidents of fraud and the arrest of many opponents. Infringements were witnessed on election day, likewise during time leading up to it. At least five independent internet sites – those of radio Echo of Moscow, the site [www.slon.ru](http://www.slon.ru), the daily Kommersant, the weekly New Times and the NGO Golos – fell victim to cyber-attacks and were inaccessible on the day of the vote. *"It is clear that this attack on our site on the day of voting is part of an attempt to prevent the publication of information about voting infringements,"* declared the editor in chief of the Echo of Moscow, Alexey Venediktov.

The director of Golos, Lilia Chibanova was detained in customs at the airport of Cheremetievo in Moscow for 12 hours and had her computer confiscated. Golos is also under investigation on suspicion of "spreading rumours". Golos was sentenced on December 1st to pay a fine of 30,000 roubles (700€) for having infringed the law that prohibited the publication of polls during the five days prior to the general elections. The organisation denies having infringed this rule.

The USA has expressed its concern about the "harassment" that seemed to prevent Golos from monitoring the elections.

The Russian general elections were marked by frequent infringements as the votes were counted; there was notably ballot box stuffing – read the press release the day after the vote written by electoral observers from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). *"Voting was well organised but the quality of the process deteriorated considerably as the votes were counted; this was typified by frequent infringements to the procedure, notably with serious signs of ballot box stuffing,"* continued the organisation which indicated that *"political competition was limited and unfair during the campaign,"* and stresses *"the lack of independence on the part of the electoral authorities and the media"*.

*"Infringements were widespread and systematic,"* accuses the Communist Party. Serguey Mitrokin, the chair of Yabloko said that in Moscow all of his

party's observers were forced to leave the polling stations before the voting slips were counted. *"It is an outrage, a reason to cancel the elections,"* he wrote on Twitter.

According to police forces more than 170 opponents were arrested as they tried to demonstrate against the way the elections had been run in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. More than 51,000 policemen were deployed in the capital on the day of the vote. The Russian election result bears witness to a decline in outgoing Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's popularity, who was booed by the crowd last week as he came to watch a boxing match at the Olympic Stadium in Moscow. The election also marks the first time that Russians have taken a step back from those in power.

In Russia, as elsewhere, the advent of internet and social networks has released information that the Kremlin had managed to have a monopoly over until now. In 2011 50 million Russians had access to the net; the country has experienced the biggest rise in the number of internet users in Europe. *"There are two Russia, one urban, hungry for knowledge, connected to internet. It is uncertain about its choices but resolutely tired of the "Putin Consensus". This is the future middle class. The other Russia is that of the retired, the civil servants, army officers who hope to gain an extra monthly 1000 roubles from the pro-Putin forces. Above all they are reticent about any kind of change,"* stresses editor Konstantin von Eggert of the Moscow News.

Political expert Boris Mejouev believes that *"the election in fact turned into a referendum against United Russia."* *"These are the most scandalous elections in Russian history. Of course there will be no revolution. But all of this will lead to a loss of legitimacy on the part of those in power,"* indicated political expert, Dmitri Oreshkin.

Moscow did not experience revolution in this general election but many analysts believe that there will be a "before" and "after" 4th December 2011 in Russia. If the economic situation continues to decline, Russians may very well show their discontent and turn away from the Russian leader in the presidential election on 4th March next. This is an election for which Vladimir Putin was unanimously appointed as United Russia's candidate by the 614 representatives of the party who were present on 27th November – and he is still running favourite.

**General Election Results on 4th December 2011 in Russia**

Turnout: 60.20%

Political Parties	% of votes won	No of seats won
<b>United Russia (ER)</b>	49.54	238
<b>Communist Party (KPRF)</b>	19.20	92
<b>Fair Russia (SR)</b>	13.20	64
<b>Democratic Liberal Party (LDPR)</b>	11.40	56
<b>Others</b>	6.66	0

Source : Agence France Presse

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