

No suspense with regard to the general elections in Russia

From **Corinne Deloy**

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D-7
7 days before
the poll

On 4th December 110 million Russians will be voting to select the 450 members of the Duma, the lower chamber of Parliament. Early voting started on 18th November. In this election 376 polling stations will be open in 146 countries; early voting will be possible in 60 of them. During the presidential election on 2nd March 2008, 20.3% of Russians living abroad fulfilled their civic duty. On 4th December the polling stations will be open in 65 stations (in 43 regions) and 27 airports (in 24 regions). In the last general elections on 2nd December 2007, 15,500 people voted in these stations. The electoral campaign started on 5th November and will end in the evening of 2nd December. The 3rd December, the eve of the election, is called "the day of silence".

On 24th November the Council of the Federation, the upper chamber of Parliament, decided, 142 in favour that the next presidential election would take place on 4th March in Russia. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has been a candidate in this election since 24th September, the date on which the President of the Republic Dmitri Medvedev put his name forward to lead the State, whilst the head of government said that he wanted Dmitri Medvedev to lead the list of United Russia (ER) in these general elections. Vladimir Putin promised to grant the post of Prime Minister to Dmitri Medvedev when he is re-elected as President of the Republic. More increasingly, this general election seems to be a general rehearsal for the one taking place on 4th March next.

United Russia, the party in office, is putting 597 candidates forward (including 117 women) 172 of whom are outgoing MPs. Around half of the MPs will therefore be re-elected. 415 candidates are party members. Each of United Russia's regional lists includes among the first three members at least one member of the All Russia People's Front (ONF), an organisation founded by Vladimir Putin, which brings together "the driving forces" of Russian society. Eight regional governors, i.e. fewer than usual, are leading United Russia's list in their region: Igor Shuvalov (Primorye), former Prime Minister (2007-2008) Viktor Zubkov (Volgograd), Igor Sechin (Stavropol), Viacheslav Volodin (Saratov), Alexander Zukov (Kaliningrad), the Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Dmitri Kozak (Saint Petersburg), Natural Resources and Ecology Minister, Yuri Trutnev (Perm), and the Emergency Situations Minister, Serguey Shoigu (Krasnoïarsk). The party of outgoing Prime Minister Vladimir Putin

(ER) has been losing ground in the polls. According to the Levada institute it is due to win 51% of the vote, i.e. -11 points less than in November 2010. Certain to win on 4th December, the party is aware however that it will not repeat its 2007 result (64.30% of the vote and 315 MPs) and that it will lose its 2/3 majority in the Duma.

According to the Levada institute 61% of Russians say they are satisfied with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, i.e. -20 points in comparison with a year ago – the weakest result since August 2000, the time when the submarine Kursk sank. President Dmitri Medvedev achieves a 57% satisfaction rate. "United Russia will really need to be reorganised. The party needs new leadership to implement reforms and modernise the country's economy," declared Vladimir Putin. "When I came to power in 2000 Russia faced civil war in the Caucasus, the economy was about to collapse. We have re-established the Constitution and social standards in ten

years; citizens' revenues have risen sharply and poverty levels have declined. This trend will continue in spite of some difficulties" he declared.

United Russia's programme is focused on 8 principles including the modernisation of the economy via an increase of productivity, the improvement of the business climate, the strengthening of the fight against corruption, the increase in salaries and retirement pensions and the improvement of inter-ethnic relations.

The party is promising to make Russia the 5th most important economy in the world by creating 25 million jobs in industry and the public sector. It says that at the end of 2014 salaries will have been multiplied by 1.5, that at least 1,000 schools will have been built and that parents will no longer have to wait to enrol their children for nursery places.

For its part the All Russia People's Front has made the modernisation of the economy, the reduction of inflation, regional development, the improvement of living conditions; the fight against corruption, the improvement of the political system and the modification of the penal code, its priorities. It has asked MPs to write a yearly report about the work they have done. Many political observers wonder about the role it will play after this election.

The Communist Party, which is the leading opposition movement (KPRF) led by Guenady Zyuganov, is using the international economic crisis to criticise capitalism. It is suggesting an increase in education spending to a total of 10% of the GDP, to nationalise several companies and to introduce free healthcare. *"We shall give you back what has been taken from you"* says the communist leader, who likes to show that he has moved on and that his party has adapted to the 21st century, regularly taking China as an example.

Fair Russia (SR), led by Nikolay Levichev, is standing as the party of social equality and wants to be the *"path to individual freedom via collective action."* On 15th November last, during a television debate, its former leader, Serguey Mironov, who was removed from his position as leader of the Council of the Federation suggested to Vladimir Jirinovski (Democratic Liberal Party LDPR) that they form a tripartite coalition with the Communist Party

in the Duma. The ultra-nationalist, populist leader of the Democratic Liberal Party refused saying that his party was going to win the election on 4th December. He said that to do this he would demand that Fair Russia commit to pleading the cause of "original Russians" and to withdraw from the Socialist Internationale. In the eyes of the party in office Vladimir Jirinovski is one of its best opponents because of his ability to win protest votes.

Yabloko, a liberal party led by Alexey Mitrokin (who will be second on the party's list after its founder Grigori Yavlinski) stands as the legatee of the Democratic Constitutional Party created in 1905. It is putting forward a programme entitled "Russia needs change", based on three principles: the creation of a modern, efficient State, the implementation of an efficient economy – i.e. diversified and truly competitive in which private property would be inviolable – and the development of human potential. The party is promising to counter the merger of the business world and that of political power in Moscow. *"In Russia, it is called the oligarchy; in Europe it is called the mafia,"* repeats Grigori Yavlinski. He hopes to throw new light on the country's history, which is *"vital to be able to move forwards"*, highlighting the *"illegal change-over of power in 1917"* and he says he wants *"Stalinian and Bolshevik repression"* to be acknowledged. The party, which lost its representation in the Duma in the last general elections on 2nd December 2007, is confident. *"If turnout is over 60% then Yablokov will win around 10% of the vote,"* declared Grigori Yavlinski, who indeed believes that high turnout will make infringements more difficult.

According to the latest poll by FOM, published on 19th and 20th November last, United Russia is due to come out ahead with 39% of the vote. The Communist Party led by Guenady Zyuganov is due to win 12%, the Democratic Liberal Party led by Vladimir Jirinovski 10%, Fair Russia, led by Alexey Mitrokin, 9%. Yabloko, Patriots of Russia, the Nationalist Left Party led by Guenady Semigin and Just Cause (PD), a party led since 20th September last by Andrey Dunayev, are due to win 1% of the vote each and therefore will not be in a position to take seats in the Duma.

According to Levada, most Russians say they are certain that United Russia will win on 4th December and the electoral apathy this situation leads to is beneficial to Vladimir Putin. According to a poll 18% of those who say they do not want to vote in the election say that the ruling party will

win anyway and 8% say that the election will be rigged.

Finally Nashi (Ours), a youth movement which says it is anti-fascist and which supports Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, will meet in a forum in Moscow on 4th 6th December next.

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