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Russia Can Join the Club Of Western Democracies

By Mark Feygin

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The issue of how the West influences Russia's fate has come up in connection with the March 2012 presidential election. Once again, this raises a question about the West's strategic goals for Russia.

The United States and its European partners couldn't be happier with Russia's weak position both domestically and on the global arena, which rivals the heyday in warm U.S.-Russian relations during the 1990s under President Boris Yeltsin. The main reason for Russia's current position is that it continues to weaken both industrially, technologically and militarily.

The deplorable state of the Russian military is clear to everyone. The only approach the Kremlin has found for coping with it is to spread clumsy, Soviet-style propaganda that makes claims about the military's great accomplishments. This can only evoke laughter in the corridors of the Pentagon and NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Russia remains an underdeveloped country that is overly dependent on raw materials exports. Although the West pays a high price for Russia's oil and gas, the burden is lessened by the fact that Russia imports heavily from the West and also invests much of its capital there.

When it finally became clear that a resurgent, authoritarian Russia did not want to unify with the West and work with the EU and NATO, Washington and Brussels decided to maintain a low-intensity confrontation with Russia.

Putin has swung from one extreme to the other in his relationship with the West. For example, three weeks before the presidential election in March 2000, in answer to a question from a BBC reporter about what he thought about Russia joining NATO, Putin answered, "Why not?" But in February 2007, Putin delivered a scorching Munich speech condemning NATO and U.S. unipolarism.

Nonetheless, the West has had a relatively comfortable relationship with the Kremlin since Putin came to power. Putin not only chose not to interfere in international affairs, but even helped the West to protect its interests. To help cover this up, Putin has used anti-Western rhetoric for domestic consumption.

Meanwhile, President Dmitry Medvedev wants to include Russia in the alliance of Western democracies. This is possible because Russia, despite having Eastern traits, is still a largely Western civilization. Most leaders in the West believe that Russia should join the club. And eventually that is exactly what will happen.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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