The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

A Duma That Thinks a Lot Like Putin

By The Moscow Times

December 08, 2011



During an Oct. 28 meeting with the Russian Chamber of Commerce, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said: "We need an effective, functioning State Duma — not one that docilely rubber-stamps like in the Soviet Union, but one that thinks. The Duma was created for that purpose: to think."

We agree 100 percent. But what is Putin doing to create this kind of Duma?

Putin's comment on Nov. 24, when he met with United Russia leaders, was not very encouraging. He criticized a chronic lack of agreement within European parliaments, as well as the U.S. Congress, in which the "two parties can never agree." This deficiency in Western parliamentarianism, according to Putin, was the cause of their economic crises.

Meanwhile, Putin said Russia avoided U.S. and European debt problems that have crippled their economies thanks primarily to United Russia. Apparently, high oil prices from 2000-08 and former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin's prudent policies were only secondary factors.

Also, recall Putin's comment in January 2010, when he said Russia should never allow the "Ukrainization of the political system." It apparently had too much arguing, debate and discussion for his liking.

But this is the essence of a democratic system. Yes, it is often messy and cumbersome, but as Winston Churchill correctly said, all other systems are even worse.

Putin apologists love to point to other one-party "vertical power structures," such as China. But Russia is not China — and will most likely never be able to repeat its apparent successes for a host of reasons grounded in different national mentalities, work ethics and other economic and political factors.

The other reason why Russia will not become China is, strangely enough, related to Putin's own notion of a national leader. China changes its national leaders every 10 years or so, which is clearly not in Putin's plans.

Even though United Russia lost nearly a quarter of its seats in the Duma, the Kremlin will still be able to use its powerful administrative resources to enforce its "party discipline" among the other three so-called opposition parties in parliament. Only the most naive believe President Dmitry Medvedev's words about "coalition building" in the Duma, much less that the vote was "democracy in action."

No, Putin prefers a "fast-track" Duma made up of a United Russia majority and Kremlin-loyal minority parties. But what he doesn't seem to understand is that there is no fast track to democracy — or modernization for that matter.

Meanwhile, permitting widespread vote-rigging and perpetuating a subservient, rubber-stamp Duma is a fast track straight to stagnation, political degradation and social unrest.

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

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/12/08/a-duma-that-thinks-a-lot-like-putin-a11317