

Sustaining a Strong Russia

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Voters went to the polls on Sunday and picked the country's next president. According to Article 80 of the Constitution, the future head of state will set the main course of domestic and foreign policy and represent Russia to both its citizens and in international relations.

The entire world is interested in the final results. After all, it will affect the future foreign policy of Russia — a leading power and major actor on the global arena.

Russia supports international law and advocates a peaceful and pragmatic approach to protecting basic human rights.

This question becomes especially important against the backdrop of disturbing trends over the past 20 years in the West's relationship toward Russia. These trends include a Cold War mentality; double standards; direct violations of international law, including the United Nations Charter; and the use of color revolutions to achieve geopolitical supremacy.

Of particular concern has been a surge in Russophobia in the West. We have seen this most

recently in the negative reaction to Russia's lawful actions in the UN Security Council with regard to the resolution on Syria and the prevention of other regional conflicts. It has also been seen in the support of NATO expansion and of U.S. missile defense installations in Europe close to Russia's border without considering how this will undermine Russia's national security.

In answer to these trends against Russia, after the country's new president takes the oath of office in May, he must take the appropriate steps to protect Russia's national interests while cultivating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding in dealing with the West.

During the campaign, all five of the presidential candidates emphasized the need to protect Russia's national interests and to respect international law, but there are areas where their views differ. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin favored tough diplomacy and modernizing the armed forces to strengthen the country's defense capabilities and its international prestige.

By contrast, Mikhail Prokhorov emphasized "soft power" and the development of trade, economic and humanitarian ties.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov defined pressing international issues and made specific proposals for dealing with them. His stance was clearly influenced by an understanding of Russia's historic responsibility to promote a peaceful global order and ensure stability.

This is an objective assessment based not only on the views of political analysts and comparative studies, but also on the opinions of a number of influential politicians and diplomats of the European Union — particularly those in the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Zyuganov's political platform was summed up in a document titled "My Responsibility to the Citizens of Russia." The platform set out all of Russia's foreign policy priorities and the corresponding actions it should take. For example, Zyuganov advocates improving the world order by supporting the basic principles of justice, rule of law and acceptance of a multipolar political world order.

He also called for an end to NATO-centric policies, for expanding and modernizing Russia's network of regional and global alliances and accelerating a greater integration among the former Soviet republics through alliances such as the Customs Union, the Common Economic Space, a Eurasian Union, the Union State of Russia and Belarus. Zyuganov is also committed to supporting the more than 25 million ethnic Russians who live outside of the country. All of these proposals conform to Russia's foreign policy concept as well as its political and legal obligations.

All of the presidential candidates put forward a number of worthy proposals for ensuring Russia's national and international security, and their ideas should all be incorporated into the next president's policies — both domestic and abroad.

This would be the best way to improve relations with the West while at the same time protecting Russia's national interests.

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