

4 Ways for Opposition To Broaden Its Support

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It is often argued that the Russian protest movement is ebbing because it lacks a positive agenda. Indeed, such an agenda has not been fully articulated at the protest rallies in Moscow. But it exists and will keep driving the protests to overhaul Vladimir Putin's system.

Here are four of the agenda's most important elements:

1. Limit presidential terms to two for life. The protests were born out of the feeling of indignity and disgust with the tandem's "castling" that was announced on Sept. 24. The prospect of Putin's presidency-for-life and the unconstitutional role of a presidential seat-warmer performed by

Dmitry Medvedev made obvious the need for closing the constitutional loophole that made this political travesty possible. This amendment would legally bar Putin from running again in 2018, and it would also prevent a repeat of this castling trick under another administration.

Medvedev proposed this term limit for governors and hinted that they should be considered for the president. With Russia's tradition of prolonged arbitrary rule, a non-negotiable limit of two terms for life for presidents is a must if Russia is to have any chance of becoming a democracy.

2. Reintroduce single-mandate districts in State Duma elections, preferably by switching to a British or U.S. model where all members are elected in single-mandate districts. This is essential for opening up the political system to new people who seek public office and serve their constituencies. The current system is a sham. Voters do not know whom they are voting for, and party lists that often contain glamour candidates — aka "locomotives" — who do very little legislating in the Duma.

3. Return direct elections to regional voters for their Federation Council representatives. Like presidential term limits, this would require a constitutional amendment, but it is a small price to pay for salvaging the upper chamber of parliament, which is currently a cross between the Forbes list of billionaires and a political retirement home for fired governors. This will create alternative centers of power to counterbalance Putin and strengthen the country's federalist system.

4. Overhaul campaign finance laws to level the playing field for parties with stricter limits on campaign contributions, a ban on government funding of parties and a ban on the soft-money financing that United Russia is so fond of using.

This is a positive agenda for the protesters to rally around and press for change.

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