

“The Future of Multiparty Democracy in Russia”

FPC EVENT REPORT

Breakfast seminar with Andrei Kunov and Alexei Sitnikov

Senior Researchers at the Open Economy Institute, Moscow

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Foreign Press Association
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On 8 April, the Foreign Policy Centre held a breakfast seminar with Andrei Kunov and Alexei Sitnikov, Senior Researchers at the Open Economy Institute in Moscow. The event aimed to explore the preferences of Russian voters in the 1995, 1999 and 2003 Duma elections. The speakers discussed state monopoly of power and the implications for the future of the multiparty system in Russia.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

The discussion began with an overview of Russian political history, characterised by a one party system and with a lack of experience of multiparty democracy. Throughout the 1990s the communists and democrats had strong ideological roots and held onto power. Following the unification and domination of the centre parties, under Putin, which have no ideology other than loyalty to Putin, the communists and democrats were sidelined. With the domination of the Unity Party came the elimination of ideology and the idolisation of the President. By 2003, the electoral landscape had completely changed, with other parties sidelined and ideologically charged voters in the minority.

The focus of the discussion was on how the dynamics of voting stability among the democrats, communists and protest parties have shifted and how these parties have been sidelined.

Kunov and **Sitnikov** argued that the democrats were seen to have not received more support from voters of other parties. The reason for these changes cannot solely be attributed to central domination, rather the core electorate of these parties dissolved and there was a failure to attract support from other parties or non-voters.

The communist vote declined as a result of a loss of support of the core electorate, with core supporters being of an older generation, and a lack of additional sources of electoral support. Communist party suffering was also sustained by a decline in the importance of ideology in vote casting among the Russian electorate. Finally, the communists lost the most amount of support between 1995 and 1999 in terms of non-voters.

Among the protest parties, the rise in support was largely attributed to a less rigid ideology attracting more diverse support.

Kunov and **Sitnikov** concluded that ideology was playing a decreasingly important role and voters were largely trustful of the Kremlin to instruct them as to how to vote. It was argued that the electorate lack the ability to see their own interest in political parties and whilst the electorate still vote with expectations, the gap with delivery is growing wider. The Russian electorate has been hit by a ‘political earthquake’ destroying its previous shape as well as its infrastructure, with unstable results.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

1. What do these changes in the balance of electoral support mean?

Sitnikov argued that there has been a decrease in the role of ideology and that the resulting inclusiveness and increased catchment of each party means that the losers are those parties which have not opened up and incorporated a wider range of policies and ideas.

2. What are the prospects for the next election?

Factions within United Russia are likely to detach themselves and address issues that as yet have not been evaluated.

3. In terms of geo-politics, where are the nationalist tendencies? How can ideology be losing if there is a rise in support for the Rodina Party?

There has been a trend towards nationalist ideas, raising the question as to whether nationalism may manifest itself as an ideology.

Regarding the second question, ideology is interpreted in a much broader sense in this study, as a more 'catch-all' framework, with a general divide of 'Left-Right'.

4. The LDPR has previously had its main support base from the East, how valid are these traditional support bases today?

The old 'red belt' has disappeared. There is the start of the formation of a 'Rodina belt' along the old borders of the 'red belt'. The LDPR is still largely gaining its support from the East and there are still traditional and regional organizations.

There is also a distinction between voting patterns in the republics and the non-republics. The higher turn-out in the republics partially results from Kremlin manipulation, but it was also argued that the widening gap between voting records here can also be attributed to the stronger grip the Kremlin has on the republics as a compensatory mechanism for the declining turnout in the non-republics.

5. Is the electorate concerned with following the prescriptions of the Kremlin or are they more concerned with the party they think will provide most economic and social benefits, providing food on the table?

It was agreed that this was certainly a factor for why the electorate were voting largely for Putin based on their experiences as well as support being a response to Kremlin support for Putin.

SPEAKER'S BIOGRAPHIES

Andrei Kunov is Senior Economist at the Institute for Open Economy in Moscow. He is also a PhD candidate in political science at Stanford University. Andrei has published several articles and a book on Russia's transition to democracy and a market economy. He also holds an MA in international economics from Newcastle University in the UK, an MA in politics from Central European University in Budapest, and an BA from Kazakhstan State University.

Alexei Sitnikov is Senior Economist at the Institute for Open Economy in Moscow. In addition to an MA in Political Science from Stanford University, Alexei holds an MA in Political Science and Transition Economics from Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, where his research focused on constitutionalism in the Russian Federation. Mr. Sitnikov is also a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at Stanford University. His main research fields include party system analysis, federalism and comparative political economy.

