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Igor Yurgens: Medvedev Is Not Gorbachev

The weekly newspaper Rossiyskiye Vesti published an interview with Igor Yurgens, chairman of the executive committee of the Institute of Contemporary Development, about the prospects for the Russian presidential elections in 2012, possible candidates and scenarios for development of the country.

— Last year in an interview with our publication last year you announced that you are proponent of a second presidential term for Dmitry Medvedev. Do you still hold this view?

— Yes, I remain an advocate of Dmitry Medvedev running for a second presidential term. Medvedev has done what's most important. He has addressed our people, particularly youth, with important words and challenges that have been heard. Now, in order to find place in history not only as an oracle but as a political figure, Medvedev must over the next six years turn these words into actions.

I would also note that in the realm of foreign policy Medvedev's words have already been turned into action. They have materialized in an improved foreign policy environment for Russia. Domestically, the pilot projects that have been launched for modernization would allow the president not to have to work from scratch in this area in the case that he has a second term. So I continue to believe that Medvedev should put his candidacy forward for the 2012 presidential elections. And I continue to think that these elections should be as democratic as possible given the realities we live in, realities that cannot in such a short timeframe be reformatted to correspond to the canons of a classic democracy. Although we should strive to achieve this.

You can ask the question: if the elections were held today in correspondence with canons of Western democracy and both Putin and Medvedev participated in the election, who would win? I would say that at the moment, according to public polls, Putin leads. And if he put all of his efforts toward this, of course he would win.

Several days ago the prime minister's press secretary Dmitry Peskov announced that Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev will decide together which one of them will run. And if Medvedev becomes the presidential candidate, then this will amount to an act of self-sacrifice by Putin, the stronger and more experienced politician. If it will be Putin, we will continue to serve our country under his leadership as well.

— *Western press often position you as an opponent of Putin. Does this correspond to reality?*

— This absolutely does not correspond to reality. It seems to me that the first eight years of Vladimir Putin were exemplary, taking into account the difficult situation which he inherited. The results of Putin's presidency place him among the most effective of Russia's leaders. And I say this without turning a blind eye toward such very difficult issues, such as the Yukos affair. But in my view, this is outweighed by his most important achievement – the stable development of the country. But the cycle of stabilization has passed, and the cycle of modernization is at hand, and the leader of this cycle is Medvedev.

— *Could you dispel the worried of the conservative part of our society that a second presidential term of Medvedev would mean the radical modernization of the country according to an extreme liberal scenario? Would this entail a repeat of the Gorbachev era? Would Putin be fired?*

— Nothing in history ever repeats itself exactly. So no, this won't happen. Medvedev is not Gorbachev. As far as radical modernization is concerned, a form of modernization that could disrupt the balance of the country, this apriori is not possible. The president knows how to listen to differing opinions and he hears them. And this guarantees against a rush to extremes. And for this reason the firing of Putin as prime minister does not match the logic of Medvedev's actions.

— *On the extreme but not marginal wing of our political systems we have the Presidential Council for Human Rights, which is chaired by Mikhail Fedotov, who recently said that we, like the Germans have, should come to grips with our history. In other words, Fedotov in essence made an indirect attempt to equate the USSR with Nazi Germany.*

— That is both an incorrect statement and an overwrought interpretation. The Presidential Council for Human Rights, of which I am a member, is striving from reconciliation and not a worsening of the situation. That is why I personally speak against the burial of Lenin, as this step would damage stability.

But since this question has arisen, I would say the following: the Soviet Union is the winner of World War Two. During that horrific war we together with our Western Allies defeated absolute evil, the misanthropic Nazi regime of Germany.

It's true that a number of Baltic countries are trying to draw parallels between Hitler regime and Stalin's regime. But such views are absolutely contrary to the historical truth. I would again emphasize, that without the Soviet Union, there would have been no victory over fascist Germany. And today we would be living in a different world.

Interview by Dmitry Yermolaev