

Russian headlines - press review

(prepared by the EU Delegation in Moscow and the EP Secretariat):

1) Election race begins: Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Monday 29 August signed a decree setting the State Duma elections for December 4 and urged political parties not to incite nationalist or extremist sentiment during campaigning. At present, 4 parties are represented in the Russian Parliament: “United Russia”; the Communist Party; “The Just Russia” and the Liberal Democrats (LDPR). At the coming elections, at least 7 officially registered parties will compete for seats in the Parliament. The next Duma will have representatives of only United Russia, CPRF and LDPR predict the leader of Russia’s Liberal-Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovski. According to some reports the Ruling United Russia party hopes to win over 300 seats in the State Duma. *(All media)*

2) Government will be changed after elections: According to Duma speaker Boris Grizlov, Russian government will be changed after elections. The first resignations are expected to take place in winter right after Duma elections. Then the new Russian President will appoint a new government in May. Experts say that it is likely that the government will be headed by someone capable to introduce unpopular reforms and who has no political ambitions. *(Nazavisimaya Gazeta)*

3) Right Cause’s manifesto: The Rights Cause party’s recently published manifesto, in which it has accused the presidency of becoming an all-powerful monarchy and called for more powers for the State Duma. Right Cause proposed the introduction of a constitutional cap on the number of seats held by one party in the Duma and to elect one-quarter of deputies directly as opposed to through party lists. It also suggests the Duma to have the right to impeach ministers. *(All media)*

4) Public approval of Medvedev and Putin’s ratings declined in August: The rating of trust to President Medvedev slipped by 3% in August from 37% to 34%, while the rating of trust to PM Putin declined from 45% to 43%, according to the latest VTSIOM opinion poll. *(RBK daily)*

5) From ecology to politics: The leader of Khimki forest defenders Eugenia Chirikova started all Russia's political action to promote idea of a "list of traitors of the public interests". The first nominees for the list are Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Transport Minister Igor Levitin. Some experts say that after losing her forest battle Ms. Chirikova is trying to stay in politics by attracting media attention. *(Kommersant)*

6) Rospotrebnadzor ready to lift import ban on Georgian wines and mineral water: Head of Russia's consumer rights watchdog, Gennady Onischenko, said after a meeting with Georgian opposition politician Kakha Kukava in Moscow that he does not see any obstacles for the resumption of exports of Georgian wines and mineral water to Russia/ Companies who want to export to Russia will have to undergo some checks and then they can return to the Russian market, he said. *(Izvestiya)*

7) Russian primaries: first results: Russia is summing up the results of the primaries which the United Russia party and the All-Russia People's Front held in the country's regions last month. This type of event is new for the country and the institution of preliminary voting is only taking shape. The head of the government and the leader of the United Russia party Vladimir Putin proposed introducing the procedure of primaries for all political parties. According to public opinion poll conducted by independent Levada Centre, not more than 1% of citizens participated in the primaries, and only 19% trust the results. Only 5% of Russians are well aware about primaries, while 35% are not sure what it is. Notably, 18% think that the primaries are held in order to create visibility of democratic elections. *(All media)*

8) Valdai forum postponed. The date of the annual Valdai Discussion Club which unites world experts on Russian affairs was moved from September to November. The meetings of the Valdai Club are held annually since 2004 and give participants an opportunity to meet with Russian President and Prime Minister. While according to some reports, the date was changed because the experts would like to meet Russian officials just before parliamentary elections, the official sources say that November is more convenient for academics. Reportedly President Medvedev will not participate this time. He will instead participate in a Yaroslavl political forum, which will take place on 7-8 September. *(Kommersant)*

9) Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC) Vladimir Churov will personally handle the statements from political parties alleging serious violations of election legislation and announce the results to the public. "Our election commission is noted for a high level of responsibility. Each CEC member works on specific guideline and is fully responsible for it. I believe political parties much bear the same responsibility," Churov told reporters on Wednesday. He reminded about several cases when representatives of this or that party alleged "outrageous breaches" of the election law, which however, were never confirmed. In this connection, Churov called for "expanding the political parties' responsibility for what they say." "I'm introducing this practice into this election cycle," he said. If someone makes statements about serious violations of the election law without documented proof, "I personally request the necessary documents and consequently announce to the public whether or not the information has been confirmed," Churov said. "The parties and other participants in the election process must bear the highest responsibility for the authenticity of the information they disseminate," the CEC chairman said. (ITAR-TASS)

10) New faces of United Russia: After the People's Front primaries are over, it is expected that the United Russia's fraction in the State Duma will be substantially renewed. According to United Russia's official, half of the UR fraction will be changed. The list of the new deputies cans be roughly broken down into such categories as stars, businessmen, people from healthcare sector, and working class representatives. (*Vedomosti*)

11) Putin suggests mandatory primaries: Speaking at a meeting of the All-Russia People's Front Coordinating Council, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said he wants to introduce primaries for all political parties. According to media reports, opposition parties criticized this proposal because they see it as interference into internal party affairs. Some experts note that although the system of primaries works well in some democratic states, in Russian situation it will be turned into "controlled and manageable" process. Some analysts see Putin's move as a bid to boost his party's popularity. (*All media*)

12) Matviyenko's letter of resignation accepted: President Dmitry Medvedev has signed a decree on the early termination of the St. Petersburg governor's powers. Georgy Poltavchenko, the current presidential envoy in the Central Federal District, has been appointed as acting governor of St. Petersburg. Newspapers report that Poltavchenko appointment came as a surprise for many. Experts note that Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin may have promoted the nomination and that acting Governor is Putin's ally. *(All media)*

13) Potential losses of Russian companies in Lybia: Head of Rosoboronexport, Anatoly Isaykin, said at the MAKS-2011 air show that the company's losses from the UN sanctions on Libya could amount to \$4 billion. Russian oil companies Gazpromneft and Tatneft had operated in Libya before. Russian Railways has a contract to build a high-speed rail link between the Libyan cities Syrt and Benghazi. *(Vedomosti)*

14) Valentina Matvienko wins municipal elections: The media notes unprecedented scale of preparations and high results that Ms. Matvienko showed in municipal elections in St. Petersburg. According to preliminary results, she got 92% and 94.5% of votes in two St. Petersburg districts. Reportedly, the cadets and pensioners were voting massively in both districts. Newspapers report that clowns offered free ice cream and health-conscious voters could get medical examinations right at the polling stations. *(Kommersant, Interfax, Izvestiya)*

15) New political movement registered: According to Dmitry Rogozin, who is Russia's permanent representative to NATO, the Justice Ministry has registered the all-Russian public organization, Homeland-Congress of Russian Communities. Rogozin is heading this organization and reportedly could leave his position in the fall to focus on domestic politics. Some observers say that the Congress of Russian Communities could join the Popular Front. *(All media)*

16) Opposition calls to vote against all: Russian opposition and some public activists are going to take part in forthcoming elections under a slogan "vote against all". They will launch a special promo campaign motivating voters to strike out ballots. Initiative is headed by the leader of the Party of People's Freedom Boris Nemtsov and is supported by Khimki Forest defenders along with some writers and cultural figures *(Kommersant)*