

Leadership Transition in Russia: Continuity or Change?

Panel: Session 6 (Lilac/Tulip)

Date/Time: April 26, 2012 / Military 17.30-18.45

Organizing Institution: Center for the National Interest

Speakers: Kim Taehwan, Korea Foundation (Moderator)
Nikolas Gvosdev, Naval War College
Andranik Migranyan, Institute for Democracy and Cooperation
Andrei Korobkov, Middle Tennessee State University

Panel Short Summary

Sarah-Lena Vonderberg, Seoul National University
Heeyoung Shin, Seoul National University

Putin's reelection raises the question: what form will his leadership take? The topic brought on opposing viewpoints from three participating panelists. Professor Nikolas Gvosdev argued Putin is positioned to continue where he left off. Andrei Korobkov presented some challenges Putin will face in the upcoming years with the changed Russian situation from the 1990s. Andranik Migranyan had a different approach, seeing the soon-to-be Russian president as a most competent leader capable of steering Russia in the right direction.

Gvosdev first noted the differences between Russia of now in 2012 and of 2000. In the past Putin presented a vision of Russia, economically developed and dominant in global politics. Following the disastrous 1990s, he needed to restore Russia to what it had been, and hence the populace agreed to bestow a certain amount of power to Putin. Now the situation is different: the state has stabilized and his support in the polls is weaker. A "renewal" of the government is needed. People from the post-soviet generation must take part. This presents a security problem for the retiring former players. Internationally Russia's global standing is weaker compared to the other BRIC nations. Russia's relationship with Europe, China, and the United States need redefining. He concluded by pointing out that a real transition of power has not occurred in Russia over the past twelve years.

Dr. Andrei Korobkov raised five issues. First, Medvedev was chosen as next president because he could never be an actual successor. The second issue was Putin himself. He raised the question: who is Putin and why is he so popular in Russia? Third, he asked

what Russia will face after this election. He re-emphasized the fact that the Russian government needs new faces, while the current members of government do not want to give up their privileges. The fourth point was Putin's isolation from information. By building information and power vertically Putin has cut off alternative sources of information, which is very dangerous for him. Last but not least Korobkov raised the issue about the economic future of Russia. He pointed out that Russia needs to move away from its reliance on natural resources.

Andranik Migranyan opposed the first two speakers on many points. The situation in Russia is not as "gloomy" as perceived by some outside sources. Putin's presence in world politics is not just based on Russia's standing in the world alone, but on the basis of his personal leadership. The need for "new faces" in Russian politics is also exaggerated. The top profile figures in politics have not changed for the past few decades in the United States. Putin plans to modernize the economy, allowing for the companies in the non-commodities sector to lead economic growth in Russia, and he is more than capable of doing so.

Russia's future depends much on Putin's leadership in his upcoming term. Nobody disputes that the system was built around Putin. Changes are necessary both economically and politically. Putin stands to continue his own legacy.

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