

RUSSIA'S UPCOMING ELECTIONS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR PUBLIC AND COMPETITIVE POLICIES



SEPTEMBER 22, 2011

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Washington: 2012

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The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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The briefing was held at 2 p.m. in room 210, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC, Mark Milosch, Chief of Staff, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Panelists present: Mark Milosch, Chief of Staff, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Kyle Parker, Policy Adviser, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Leon Aron, Director of Russian Studies, American Enterprise Institute; Ariel Cohen, Senior Research Fellow for Russian and Eurasian Studies, The Heritage Foundation; and Vladimir Kara-Murza, Member of the Federal Political Council, Solidarity.

Mr. MILOSCH. On behalf of Chairman Chris Smith, I'd like to welcome everybody to today's briefing on Russia's upcoming elections. My name is Mark Milosch, and I'm Congressman Smith's Staff Director at the Helsinki Commission.

Russia has Duma or parliamentary elections scheduled for early December, and the parliamentary campaigns are now well under way. Presidential elections will take place in March, and there's already plenty of interest and concern over who will be chosen to lead the Russian federation at that time. I expect our panelists to focus on the Duma elections because they are more timely, but I trust we will also hear thoughtful forecasts on what may happen next March.

Many of you know and follow the work of Helsinki Commission, but let me underscore the specific interests our Commissioners have long taken in democratic elections throughout the OSCE region.

The vast majority of our commissioners are elected members of the U.S. Congress who frequently participate in international observation missions and bring a unique perspective, since they too have to periodically stand before the public, which includes a robust and independent media here in America, as they seek the consent of those in whose names they will govern.

In an era of fractious politics at home and dizzying change abroad, the fundamental importance of free and fair elections is something we all agree on. And indeed, all 56 OSCE member states have agreed on this in various freely undertaken OSCE commitments. These same commitments bring us here today to examine Russia's compliance with and implementation of various international accords and norms concerning elections.

I hope our expert witnesses will share their wisdom on the larger picture and the longer view as well as to how the December and March votes will fit into the history of representative government in Russia, with all its ups and downs, going all the way back to the Nogerod Veliky—perhaps Kyle will correct my pronunciation when we turn to him on that—including the imperial Dumas, the Supreme Soviet, and the historic election of Boris Yeltsin.

There is growing concern that the coming round of Russian elections is likely to be significantly less free and less transparent than those in 2007 and 2008, which were widely criticized and even panned for failing to meet international standards.

A successful election begins long before Election Day, even before the campaign starts. It is marked by access to the ballot for all parties and citizens and by a campaign environment that allows candidates and voters to exercise their fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association.

So we can already begin to form preliminary judgments on the upcoming elections. The early refusal of Russian authorities to register the People's Freedom Party was a troubling indicator of where the December elections are already headed.

Some have dismissed the coming elections as futile exercises with predetermined outcomes. But while we can begin to form judgments about the pre-election phase of the campaign, we also don't want to jump to conclusions or start off with a negative hypothesis. Russia is a big place and a complicated country where even the most severe autocrats have had difficulty exerting their will on those in its more remote reaches.

At this point I'll turn the briefing over to Kyle Parker, a Commission Staff Advisor and a tireless advocate for human rights in Russia, who has done outstanding work, most recently on the case of Sergey Magnitsky. Kyle will introduce our witnesses and moderate the briefing.

Kyle?

Mr. PARKER. Thank you, Mark.

And welcome, everyone, to what I hope is the first in possibly a series of events that will address a topic that is going to be relevant for at least the next 6 months as we move toward both the parliamentary and Presidential elections.

We have a stellar panel here today. And I will sort of summarize their bios, which are out on the table. Again, we hope for a briefing to really be an opportunity for dialogue and discussion, so please take good notes so that we can have good questions and interaction following the presentations, which will begin with Dr. Aron of American Enterprise Institute.

He's a resident scholar and director of Russian studies there. He wrote the book—the definitive biography on President Yeltsin entitled "Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life," has published countless scholarly articles in various journals and newspapers, regularly appearing in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, was an adjunct professor at Georgetown University, was awarded the peace fellowship at the U.S. Institute of Peace, and received his Ph.D. from Columbia University.

Dr. Aron, it's a pleasure to have you here today. And we turn the floor over to you for 7 to 10 minutes for any remarks you wish to make. Thank you, doctor.

Dr. ARON. Yes. Thank you very much, Kyle. You asked me to supply very briefly a broad framework, kind of a bird's eye view, which might be useful in analyzing the Russian parliamentary and Presidential elections in December and March.

In the testimony before me, the written part, of course, the word election is in quotation marks. In the end, Russia only has one voter. His name is Vladimir Putin. And chances are that he might be persuaded to vote for himself and/or another place holder, and he is likely to cast his vote for the United Russia Party as well. So the results of both elections are more or less preordained.

And yet the coming cycle is well worth our attention, not because of the results but because of the political, social, and economic contexts in which these elections are going to take place. And in that, I submit this cycle is quite different from the three preceding ones, in 2000, 2004, and 2008. And therefore, what might happen after the election could be quite different as well.

And before I outline these differences, let me explain why they matter. Russia is not a totalitarian state where terror and unchallenged propaganda are the main pillars of political stability. It is not a North Korea or a Cuba. And, of course, it's not a Soviet Union. And so it is an authoritarian state.

And in such states, in addition to occasional acts of terror and intimidation, and in addition to the control of the media, which, by the way, as opposed to totalitarian states, is not at all unchallenged, especially on the Russian Internet today, in addition to all of this, such states might have a certain quotient of legitimacy, of popular support. They cannot survive on terror and lies alone.

And in the past, the Putin regime did have a measure of the support. In 2000, Putin was genuinely popular because, A, he was not Yeltsin, and B, because he dealt decisively with the threat, no matter whether real or manufactured or perceived, of militant Islam from Chechnya.

He was popular in 2004 because Russia was in the middle of perhaps the strongest economic boom since the 1910s and because, as Putin, and the television under his control, which is watched by 95 percent of Russians, never missed a chance to remind us Russia was no longer in what they called the lawless and corrupt 1990s.

And despite the early signs, the early signs of a global financial crisis, these legitimizing factors more or less worked and carried the regime forward even in 2008.

Today all these reservoirs of legitimacy are close to depletion. That Putin is not Yeltsin and that 2012 is not 1992 barely matters to millions who were too young to remember, and especially—and here we're talking about tens of millions—who are used to steady growth of their incomes. And not only that growth is all but gone, but there is a strong consensus among Russian economists that no matter who's elected and what the price of oil will be, the next president will have to adopt very painful cost-cutting measures to stave budget deficits and inflation.

As to the lawless 1990s, public opinion polls show that, starting with a few years ago, a majority believes that there is more, not less, corruption today in Russia than in 1990s—in the 1990s. And there are signs of an emerging civil society, some of whose leaders I had the good fortune to meet and interview during a long trip across Russia this past July. And what we found is that the civil society is increasingly impatient with daily indignities. It is not afraid of the state. And it's increasingly insistent on fighting for its rights.

Every respectable Russian political analyst today acknowledges quite openly that the political and economic elites are at the dead end. Everyone agrees, again, quite openly, that the present political and economic models that Putin forged and enforced since the

early 2000s are close to exhaustion and that something has to be done urgently to prevent the country from becoming a bona fide backward petrol state. Yet no one knows how to do this within the current political framework.

And so the formerly monolithic elite is beginning to show fissures. The vaunted vertical of power that until now secured the implementation of the Kremlin's policies is showing signs of ineffectiveness. The United Russia Party is so widely despised that Putin seemed to prepare to discard it in favor of the so-called Popular Front, but the Front too appears to have become a flop.

And another flop quite recently was an attempt to legitimize the elections by rejuvenating another Kremlin creation, an ostensibly liberal party on the right called the Right Cause. But under the—largely under the pressure from bolder and truly popular leaders from discontented provinces, it stated to look like a real opposition party. As a result, it threatened to slip the leash and it was subverted and essentially discarded.

Let me conclude by saying that it is one thing to manipulate elections when a transition society which has never experienced a real democracy is in the middle of an unprecedented economic boom or when the memory of the painful economic revolution is still vivid and when the elites are united behind a political and economic model that the leader offers.

It is quite another thing to manipulate elections when neither of these conditions are present. One can bend a branch when it's supple and flexible. When it is desiccated, it may snap.

Thank you.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you, Dr. Aron.

We'll now turn to Dr. Ariel Cohen, who is Senior Research Fellow for Russian and Eurasian studies at the Heritage Foundation. Dr. Cohen is a weekly commentator for Voice of America, a number of other outlets; UPI guest columnist. His work includes economic development, political reform in the former Soviet republics, energy security, the global war on terrorism, and the continuing conflict in the Middle East, is a feature among Russian commentators certainly here in Washington.

We're very happy to have you here today, Dr. Cohen. Quickly, prior to—I'm just trying to—getting lost here in your impressive biography. [Laughter.]

Dr. Cohen has written nearly 500 articles and 25 book chapters and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and earned his doctorate from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts.

Dr. Cohen, over to you.

Dr. COHEN. Thank you very much.

And I want to commend the Commission for focusing for decades on issues of liberty and human rights, especially, but not only in Russia.

The good news in the coming elections is that there is stability and predictability in Russia. The bad news is that the stagnation and communication disconnect from the electorate threatens the Russian political system, as my friend and colleague, Leon Aron, just so aptly pointed out.

As the Speaker of the Duma, Boris Gryzlov, famously said, quote, "The Duma is not a place for discussions," unquote. For the last 12 years, the space for political discussions in the Duma shrunk. The voices of United Russia, the Communist party of the Russian

Federation, and Vladimir Zhirinovsky's ultranationalists, the so-called Liberal Democratic Party, which is neither liberal nor democratic, became irrelevant or are becoming irrelevant to the Russian political debate.

Moreover, traditional public politics is continuously losing its relevance. As two Russian researchers wrote in a recent detailed report for the E.U. Institute of Security Studies, quote, "Russian political parties, the parliament and the state-controlled media are currently failing to perform the traditional function of acting as channels of communication between the ruling classes—ruling circles and the general public. These institutions often ignore or are too slow to notice important social developments, which undermine political trust in them."

The authorities acknowledge this loss of trust and lack of communication through traditional channels of public politics. Pundits have recently pointed out that the growing gap between the ruling class and the institutions, on the one hand, and the Russian population, on the other hand, could trigger a major political crisis.

This is regrettable, but not surprising. For over three centuries, since the time of Peter the Great, importation of western institutions to Russia produced a transformation, which made such political contraptions barely recognizable. The parliaments almost never had a true lawmaking function. They have become talking clubs in the best case or rubber stamps for most egregious legislation in the worst case.

You can think about [inaudible] Supreme Soviet and the evolution of the Duma. And in all that, all-powerful executive branch [inaudible] the Secretary General, President, or Prime Minister, more often than not, ruled by [inaudible] a fiat. In fact, these western-sounding and—looking pseudo-institutions, such as courts, political parties, the bicameral parliament, made the managed democracy—another term for autocracy—more bluntly, stable, and capable of deceiving both the Russians and the foreigners. After all, isn't Russia going to have Duma elections on December 4th?

With the political parties—what are the political parties which will and will not participate in the coming elections? As the late Russian prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, famously quipped, whichever party were [inaudible] the outcome is the Communist party of the Soviet Union, the CPSU. [Speaks phrase in Russian.]

The United Russia is trying to capture the center of the political spectrum. And as its popularity was falling, Vladimir Putin came up with an idea of the All-Russia Popular Front, in which pro-Putin forces, not necessarily members of the United Russia [inaudible] and get seats in the Duma to bolster the United Russia delegation for the purpose I'll address further.

The Communists and Zhirinovsky have not come up with any new political ideas and are playing the role of what they call systemic opposition, opposition in name only, but the ones that are not challenging the current political arrangement.

What is interesting is the emergence of Dmitry Rogozin's nationalists. You can argue whether this nationalist party that is going to be the member of the Popular Front, are they going to capture the nationalist vote in order to [inaudible] the emergence of [inaudible] nationalist opposition, or they're [inaudible].

As Rogozin of the former [inaudible] party was the creation of the Kremlin back in 2004. It looks like that this is going to be the case again. But what is important is that two political parties were denied. Well, nine were denied, but two outstanding cases of parties that were denied representation.

The first one is the case of a party called Parnas, Party of People's Freedom. The Russian Justice Minister banned Parnas [inaudible] for participating in election. Led by well-known democratic politicians, including former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, former Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Ryzhkov, former Duma Vice Chairman Vladimir Ryzhkov, and former Deputy Minister of Energy Vladimir Milov, these people were neither violent nor extremist, and nevertheless their party registration was denied.

This was essentially the establishment of the 1990s. These were not people who were playing some kind of revolution of whichever color you can think of. Nevertheless, they were pushed to the margins of the political life. Some of them were beaten up. Others were arrested in demonstrations, mostly on the 31st of the month. [Inaudible] for Article 31 of the Russian Constitution, freedom of assembly.

The second case happened just last week. This is the case of Mikhail Prokhorov's the Right Course Party. As Leon pointed out, this was a pro-Kremlin, center-right party that we thought initially is coming to replace Parnas as a center-right party controlled by the Kremlin. Prokhorov thought that as long as he does not attack Putin and Medvedev personally, he has [inaudible].

For somebody who's No. 3 on the Russia Forbes list and whose net worth is estimated as \$18 billion, this is a shortsighted assessment, to say the least; maybe as shortsighted as his purchase of the New Jersey Nets.

Prokhorov ran afoul of Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the administration, the man who is a combination of Dick Morris and Karl Rove of Russia, and quickly was given short shrift. While the television coverage of Prokhorov was both pervasive and positive, overnight he became public enemy No. 1. The discussions on television of how he made his billions and of former convictions of people in his party were followed by silence. So Prokhorov lost the control of the Right Course and is no more a significant political figure. And the lesson learned from that is that unless the political party is under full control of the Kremlin, it has no right to exist.

What are the policy implications of that? We thought for a while and the Obama administration certainly thought that the reset policy is going to contribute to democratization of Russia. It wasn't the only goal of the reset. There were others, important goals—nuclear disarmament, Afghanistan, logistics, to resupply our troops in Afghanistan, the hope that Russia will play a role on the Iranian nature.

But just like with those other hopes, I would say, with the exception of those interests that Russia has independently of the reset policy, like Afghanistan, this is not to be. To wit, while the Ambassador-designate to Russia, Michael McFaul, and Vladislav Surkov co-chaired one of the working groups whose aim was to promote democracy, the performance in the run-up to the election, the lack of opposition access to government-controlled media, demonstrated these hopes brought no positive results whatsoever.

We thought that the rule of law, something that was close to the heart of Mr. Medvedev, will be addressed by the government of Russia; cases like the late Sergey Magnitsky, something that Kyle Parker provides leadership in the Sergey Magnitsky legislation; cases like Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who got another harsh sentence for crimes the majority of lawyers agree he did not commit, and has been sent to one of the camps in Russia's north, in Karelia; the cases like the two parties that are being demolished; Kremlin investigation into the anti-corruption whistleblower Alexey Navalny, which he says is revenge for exposing alleged fraud at Russian state companies. And the list is long.

So we gave Russia a lot as a part of the reset policy. We hoped for democratization. We hoped for greater freedom. And unfortunately, unfortunately for us and unfortunately for people of Russia, we did not see any results. And now they're going to the elections. They're going to put a stamp of approval for the existing political arrangement, with Mr. Putin as President, Mr. Putin as the Prime Minister. It is going to be Mr. Putin's Russia.

With the Presidency now set at 6-year term, make an easy calculation—two terms of 12 years. Twelve plus 12 is 2024. This is the term or two terms that we are expecting the Putin regime to rule Russia unless something happens. And both Leon and I'm sure Vladimir Kara-Murza can address.

So the bottom line is the stagnation of the political system, the very limited what they call managed democracy, the media, which has partial, only partial access to state-controlled channels, and serious problems with the rule of law, raise a serious question to the quality and nature of this partnership that the Obama administration is trying to accomplish.

Thank you.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you, Dr. Cohen.

I now turn it over to our final panelist, Vladimir Kara-Murza. Mr. Kara-Murza is a member of the Federal Political Council Solidarnost and has been active in Russian politics for a number of years; actually ran for the Duma himself in the 2003 elections, which were, I believe, the last Duma elections that were fully observed by an OSCE mission.

He has consulted and done campaign work with figures such as Boris Nemtsov, Garry Kasparov; has written a number of scholarly articles and also worked in Russian TV. He is the Washington Bureau Chief of RTVi television; was previously a correspondent for Novye Izvestia and Kommersant, editor in chief of the Russian Investment Review, and holds his degree from Cambridge University.

Mr. Kara-Murza, we welcome [inaudible].

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you very much. And thank you especially to the Commission for holding this important briefing and, in effect, launching the discussion here in Washington in the run-up to the Russian Duma elections, which I too, like my colleague, Dr. Leon Aron, put in quotation marks.

A few years ago, Grigory Yavlinsky, the founder of the liberal Yabloko Party, was asked to comment on another one in a long line of pieces of legislation initiated by the Kremlin in order to restrict electoral choice, restrict ballot access, generally restrict the political environment in Russia. And he replied by giving advice to the Kremlin.

He said why don't you just stop, you know, wasting your time and your energy and legislative efforts and just pass one law that would contain the list of names of people who are not allowed to contest any elections, seek an electoral office, or serve in power? He said that would be both quicker and more honest.

And this is, in fact, one of the effects the, quote-unquote, reforms introduced during Mr. Putin's rule in the last 12 years have accomplished. But indeed, it had a much bigger effect, because it's not only the opposition leaders and opposition candidates, but essentially the Russian voters as a whole have been removed from the business of Russian elections.

The last free, fair, and competitive elections in the Russian Federation to date were held on December the 19th, 1999, literally in the last days of the Yeltsin presidency. This

is by the report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which we have long considered the gold standard, as it were, of European election observations.

Since then, there has been a tectonic shift both in the practice and context and in the legal framework for elections in Russia. In terms of practice, we have seen the government establish an information monopoly already by 2003 by shutting down or taking control of all the national independent television channels and TV—TV 6, TVS. The judiciary effectively became a rubber stamp for the executive.

The arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in the midst of the 2003 election campaign sent a very strong message to all other potential opposition sponsors and opposition donors, because he, of course, was the biggest contributor to the two pro-democracy parties [inaudible] and Yabloko in the 2003 Duma election.

In terms of opportunity to campaign and the opportunity to engage in competition, we have seen increasingly the harassment and the detention of opposition candidates, the forced dispersal and brutal, very often brutal dispersal of peaceful opposition rallies, especially Moscow and St. Petersburg, the massive confiscations of opposition campaign literature, in 2007 especially, in the last campaign.

And in terms of the voting day itself, increasingly all across the country we're seeing incidents—mass incidents now—of ballot stuffing, the rewriting of protocols, the manipulations and tampering with early and absentee ballots. And there are dozens and hundreds and probably thousands of examples around the country in elections on all levels. But some of the most egregious examples from recent times—just this last August, the so-called election in St. Petersburg, which returned then-Governor Valentina Matviyenko with an official 95 percent of the vote; a very Turkmen or Soviet-style result.

In that election—and that's according to the official data—40 percent, more than 40 percent, of those who voted inexplicably rushed to the polls in the last hour of the polls being open. That's as foolproof sign as you can get of ballot stuffing, because they usually do it right at the closing time of the polling places.

A couple of years ago, in the election in Sochi, the 2014 Olympic capital, Boris Nemtsov, the opposition leader who ran for mayor, received officially, despite the pressure, despite the censorship, he received officially around 25 percent of the vote on the election day itself. But in the early ballots, which had been stored in the electoral commission, and the observers and journalists didn't have any access to them, he received zero percent. And since the early ballots constituted one third of the total, his result was obviously significantly deflated.

And also a couple of years ago in the Moscow legislative election, the precinct where the chairman of Yabloko Party, Mr. Mitrokhin, voted with his entire family on that day, reported zero votes for Yabloko Party. That was the official signed protocol.

And then, of course, another popular option for the regime was simply removing opposition candidates in the first place; like in the same Moscow election, every single candidate put forward by Solidarnost was rejected. And in the last so-called Presidential election, 2008, both major opposition candidates, Mikhail Kasyanov, the former Prime Minister, and Vladimir Bukovsky, the famous writer and dissident, were removed from—barred from the ballot on ridiculous pretexts.

And in terms of the legal framework for elections, the change has also been staggering. We have seen a ban on electoral coalitions and blocs between parties, the abolition of direct gubernatorial elections in favor of Kremlin appointments, the abolition of indi-

vidual single-member district elections for the parliament, for the Duma, so individuals can no longer run, independent candidates or, you know, party representatives as individuals. You can only run through a registered party list. The minimum turnout requirement was abolished. The against-all ballot option was abolished.

And one of the most important features of this new system is the new law on political parties, promulgated under Mr. Putin, which essentially gives the authorities an opportunity to reject any political party on the reason or on the pretext of finding one mistake, one mistake on a list of a minimum of 45,000 members that needs to be submitted to the Justice Ministry in order to be registered. So essentially the Kremlin has a monopoly now in issuing or removing licenses for electoral participation.

And as we approach this so-called election on December the 4th, we now find actually the majority of Russian political forces simply bought from the ballot. As Dr. Ariel Cohen mentioned, nine parties have been removed, disqualified by the Justice Ministry in the last 3 years. Only seven will be on the ballot.

Of those nine, the most recent example of the denial of registration was the Popular Freedom Party, the party of Mentsov and Kasyanov, in June. And the pretext was the same; the signatures—they found 79 irregularities on a list of more than 46,000 people; and to be precise, 46,148. That was the membership list. And they found 79 mistakes. And the mistakes consisted mostly of statements from people in the regions denying their affiliation with this party.

And we know for a fact that for several weeks before this decision, many local activists received threatening phone calls from local police officials, basically pressuring them to sign these statements to deny they're members of this party or to resign from it. And this is what was used to deny registration.

And this was done in direct—by the way, in direct violation of an earlier ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, which in April of this year found the Russian government's practice of denying registration to opposition parties, quote, "unjustified and disproportionate," because the European Convention on Human Rights only has a handful of reasons why you cannot register a party—if it's a threat to national security; if the party is calling for the limitation of rights of people based on ethnic or religious reasons, and so on and so forth. Obviously nothing was the case in this.

And the nine parties that were rejected, they were the widest possible spectrum, from the nationalists, the Great Russia Party, to the hard-left socialists, the United Labor Front, to the pro-democracy, pro-western Popular Freedom Party of Nemtsov and Kasyanov.

Vladimir Churov, the current Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission, famously remarked that his first law is that, quote, "Putin is always right." And too often nowadays, this seems to be the only law that functions well in Russian elections.

It's easy to see why the current regime was afraid of an open competition on the ballot box. If we turn to the results of the latest survey conducted by the Levada polling center, just in August, we'll find that 54 percent of Russian citizens expressed disapproval of the current government. That's despite the censorship, despite the absence of debates in the media or in parliament. We find that 64 percent, almost two thirds, want the composition of the current Duma, which is dominated by Putin's United Russia people, to change, quote, "totally or significantly."

Only 10 percent want the status quo. Only 10 percent are happy with the current composition of the Russian parliament. Consistently in polls—this is not just Levada; this is all polling groups—consistently, a majority of Russians want a return of direct gubernatorial elections rather than having the Kremlin appointments, as they exist today.

And the more specific figures for the pro-democracy opposition are also very far from the Kremlin propaganda that tries to present Russian democrats as kind of a marginal, insignificant part of society. For instance, this is the same Levada study from August. Twenty percent, 1 in 5, want Garry Kasparov to be in the next Duma. Almost the same number, 16 percent, want Boris Nemtsov to be in the next Duma. But, of course, neither of them will be on the ballot on December the 4th, so this is hypothetical.

Those who will be on the ballot, as my colleagues had mentioned, are basically the pre-approved shadow boxers for the ruling party, like Ziganov's Communists or Zhirinovskiy's nationalists, who have been there for years and, despite all their rhetoric, never posed any challenge to the vested interests of the regime. And as Dr. Cohen just mentioned, the example of Mikhail Prokhorov last week showed to everyone what happens if you step even ever so slightly out of line. His party was shut down.

And the only group that still—can still be said to have preserved some degree of independence, Yabloko, Russia's oldest liberal party, in the last round of regional elections in March, they had half of their candidates removed from the ballot, despite having official registration. And just yesterday they had some police trouble in Moscow when they launched the collection of signatures. They need 150,000 signatures to be registered. And they already had some trouble doing that.

And as my colleagues, Dr. Leon Aron and Dr. Ariel Cohen, just mentioned, this—the regime may have, you know, falsified the results and they may have got themselves another puppet parliament for the next few years, but by doing that, they've also shut off all the normal constitutional channels of society to communicate with the government, for people to voice their discontent, to express their concerns, and a majority—increasingly social and economic concerns in the last couple of years.

And a majority of Russians understand that. The same Levada figures show that over half, 54 percent, believe that this Duma election will be just an imitation, that there's no way to change political course in Russia through the ballot box.

And so, naturally, discontent is being manifested in other ways. Since late 2009, really since last year, since 2010, we have seen increasing flashes across the country of mass anti-government protests, the biggest ones being in Kaliningrad, in Irkutsk and in Vladivostok in 2010. These are usually sparked by some local issues, be it tax hikes in Kaliningrad or the protectionist tariffs in Vladivostok or the environmental disaster with Lake Baikal in Irkutsk.

But all have one common theme, accountability. People are fed up with having their own regions governed assent from thousands of miles away from Moscow. People often have nothing to do with their region, sometimes never been there before. People want to say how and by whom they're governed; only natural.

And this is actually a marked change from what we had in the late '80s, early '90s, when it was Moscow and Leningrad that led the way for change. Now it's the peripheries, the provinces, that are beginning to be much more active than, for now, Moscow and St. Petersburg. And according to pollsters, again, Levada gives 21 percent as the number of people who personally go out and participate in street protests. FOM, the Public Opinion

Foundation, gives a staggering figure of 49 percent. This was early this year. But in either case, it's tens of millions of people who are ready to personally go and protest.

And, of course, it's natural that the regime fears this. And they, better than anybody else, know the true value of their so-called election results and so-called election victories. They surely remember that just 9 weeks before the Mubarak regime was toppled in Egypt, Mubarak's party, quote-unquote, won over 80 percent in the parliamentary election—9 weeks. And so they're beginning to prepare for a possibility of some kind of mass disconnect, mass protest, after another round of stolen elections in December and March.

A few months ago, Vladislav Surkov, who was already mentioned a few times, the Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff, he called a meeting with Nashi, which are basically the pro-Kremlin youth thugs who specialize in harassing opposition leaders, human-rights community and foreign diplomats, such as—there was a case with the British Ambassador and the Estonian Ambassador a few years ago—Surkov called these people in and he told them—and this was an on-the-record, open meeting—he said, first of all, elections must be won by United Russia.

And second, he told them—this is a direct quote—“Prepare for elections. Train your muscles.” This, once again, was an open, on-the-record meeting. So basically a top government official was openly inciting violence against the political opposition.

Just 2 or 3 weeks ago, Russian newspapers published a leaked memo from the Ministry of the Interior giving instruction to local police chiefs in which they are authorized to disperse, quote-unquote, “unauthorized” opposition rallies with—they gave them four new methods: Truncheons, gas substances, electroshock weapons, and water cannons.

And finally, Mr. Yakimenko, who was originally the founder of Nashi, who's now a Minister in Putin's government, he had a meeting with pro-Kremlin bloggers just in the last few days, and he told them that it's essential that the pro-Kremlin bloggers and pro-Kremlin voices and Internet specialists get control over the social networks, the online social networks, by the time of the election.

And just to finish, I'd like to address one of the points mentioned in the notice for this briefing. What can western democracies do in this situation? Now, self-evidently, the task of returning democracy to Russia, the task of effecting political change in Russia, is our task. It's the task of the Russian opposition. Nobody else can or should do it for us.

But if western democracies are serious about protecting and upholding the values of the rule of law and human rights, there is one major area in which the West, the United States in particular, and even more particularly the U.S. Congress, can be extremely helpful and valuable.

All these human-rights violations that we're discussing here—the falsifying elections, censoring television, dispersing opposition rallies—which, by the way, violate not just Russia's constitutional laws, but Russia's international obligations, including under the OSCE Copenhagen document and many others, the European Convention on Human Rights—all these violations have specific names behind them, names like Surkov, like Churov, like Yakimenko, many, many others.

Now, these people who want to disperse opposition rallies like in Burma or falsify election results like in Zimbabwe, they themselves want to go skiing in Austria or Switzerland, go shopping in New York and keep their money and their kids in the West.

It's time for some personal accountability. It's time to let these people know that there will be personal consequences for their actions. And this is the most effective way

of altering their behavior, or at least making them think twice next time they think about doing something.

The U.S. Senate is about to consider a bipartisan bill, S. 1039, the Sergey Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2011, introduced by the Co-Chairman of this very Commission, Senator Ben Cardin. And this bill proposes to do exactly that. It proposes to impose travel restrictions and asset freeze against those senior officials who violate Russian citizens' internationally protected rights and freedoms, including the right to fair trial, right to democratic elections, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of expression, many others. That's in Section 4 of the bill.

And just last week, a group of Russian civil-society representatives, and not just the human-rights activists, not just political opposition leaders, but many renowned cultural figures like film director Eldar Ryazanov, actress Leah Hijakiva and many others, have sent an open letter here to the Senate leadership urging to pass this bill and to finally provide some accountability for these senior human-rights violators.

The bill stands with 22 co-sponsors as of now—Republicans, Democrats, and Independent. And with this bill, we believe—we in the Russian opposition believe that the U.S. Congress has a good opportunity to show that it is indeed committed to upholding the values of the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, not just in words but in practice.

Thank you very much, and thanks again for holding this briefing.

Mr. MILOSCH. Thanks very much, Mr. Kara-Murza.

Before I lead off with the first question, I want to recognize, sitting in the front row here, Mr. Spencer Oliver, the first Staff Director of the Commission from 1976, I think, to 1987, under then-Chairman of the Commission and of the Foreign Affairs Committee Dante Fascell.

Spencer was the figure who really built this Commission. And many of the staff or some of the staff he hired back in those days are still with us today, and, in fact, in the room today. Something we're also grateful for—since 1982, Spencer has been Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. So when he was Staff Director at the Commission, he was a forceful and brilliant fighter for democracy in Russia. Now, in his new institutional role, he is a remarkably prudent and successful diplomat for the OSCE PA.

So thank you, Spencer, for joining us.

Mr. OLIVER. Thank you.

Mr. MILOSCH. I'd like to open with the first question, which will be a question about questions. It would be easy to assume that we're here with a question that, you know, will the Russian elections be free and fair? That's the question, and the answer will be no.

I'd like to push back on that a little bit. Since we already seem to know the answer to that, maybe that's not really the question we're here for. In any case, if you're not looking for something, of course, you don't find it. If you assume something's there, you're not likely to see it.

So I'd like to ask our panelists to begin by reflecting on what should we really be watching for in this election? Are we too easily assuming that it's all bad news? Is there something out there that we should be looking for perhaps in the other direction? Even if elections are not free and fair, perhaps there are other things to be watching for, such

as a new division in Russia's governing elite that favors democracy or developments in Russia's social milieu that favor democracy.

So I'd like to step back from the easy assumption that the news is bad, there's no free and fair elections in Russia, and say, well, you know, if that's the case, what is the question, or is that really the case? Is there something good we can see here in Russia developing if we look for it?

So we'll start off with Mr. Aron.

Dr. ARON. Yes, I'd kind of like to reiterate what I said. The election—the formal results of these elections are not interesting, and obviously preordained and predetermined. But the context is very interesting. And in that sense, Mark, specifically what to look for, I am almost certain that you have to look for signs of popular discontent in the provinces.

When we traveled this summer, we met some remarkable people from the provinces, absolutely unafraid of the state. Many actually got themselves elected as what's known as somidijernsay. There is this little loophole. You don't have to belong to a party to become a member of a regional Duma.

And when I talked about the demise of the Right Cause, I mentioned that it was under pressure from some of these people, whom—again, some of whom I met—who right away told Prokhorov that, yes, if you want my name—and I'm genuinely popular in my area, in my province—in exchange, I want real participation. I want this party to be a real opposition party.

I was present at one of those conversations, and I said this is the end of the Right Cause. [Laughter.] And it was. But in the process, though, what I think the Right Cause registered is that it's becoming truly perilous, a perilous game for the regime to indulge even in these pseudo-democratic moves, because as soon as they even pro forma expand the mandate or expand the legitimate field of public participation, immediately there comes a very—I would say a rather well-organized, well-prepared, and certainly unafraid civil society that begins to protest.

So I think we will see in the process, on the election day, and definitely after the election, some signs of this maturing civil-society opposition. And I completely agree with Valodia that the most interesting things are happening in the provinces, not in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Mr. MILOSCH. Dr. Cohen.

Dr. COHEN. I wholeheartedly want to agree with Leon. And the only thing in the provinces that I think truly worth watching is the turnout in the North Caucasus republics. We have seen a 99.5 percent turnout, like the good old or bad old Soviet times. We've seen reports, when tabulated, of turnout over 100 percent in some of these republics. That's, of course, hogwash.

And if you get reports of real turnout, which would probably, if we're to judge and compare with other places in Russia, are under 50 percent or around 40 percent, that is at least a suggestion that something in the reporting system is changing.

But the last, what, 500 years of Russian history tell us that the change does not happen in the republics or in the provinces. The change is happening in the capital city. And in the tsarist times it was St. Petersburg. Now it's Moscow. And this is where the real political change happens.

As for other outliers to watch, the media access—if, all of a sudden, we see Kasyanov, Kasparov, Nemtsov, and others, and maybe unpalatable people—nationalists, national Bolsheviks—on television, engaged in real debate, I would say something is changing. The probability of that is very low.

Next, party registration. If you see parties that we don't anticipate to be registered, that's something that may indicate that there's a change; and, of course, the participation. Historically we've seen 40 percent turnout, 50 maybe—higher in the Presidential elections. Like in this country, parliamentary or Congress, turnout is lower than the Presidential. High reported numbers would be more suspect. There's not a lot of enthusiasm for these elections.

So it is really worrisome what Vladimir Kara-Murza quoted as the instructions for preparation, how to handle—how to handle elections, how to handle potential violence.

I would add that the—yes, Vladimir, it's true that we saw in Kaliningrad anti-establishment demonstrations sometimes somewhat bigger than usually you can expect. But we have also seen ultranationalist demonstrations. Some of them, there were allegations that the government sponsored or encouraged or didn't send the riot police, the OMON, against these nationalists. The first one is on the Manezh Square last winter. The second one is in Czystepode in Moscow, several hundred people demonstrating for Federal oversubsidization of the Caucasus republics.

Nationalism, I believe, has vast explosive force in Russia. It's not only Dmitry Rogozin's managed nationalism, like managed democracy. Some of it is ugly, Nazi-style, violent, skinhead. People got murdered. People are murdered every year in Russia by skinheads and ultranationalists. And they're in Europe too, by the way, elsewhere in Europe.

But the explosive potential of nationalism in the period of ennui and malaise in the Russian political system, we'd better watch it. And, more importantly, the Russian Government better watch it.

Mr. MILOSCH. Thank you, Ariel.

Mr. Kara-Murza.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thank you.

Just on that last point of nationalist versus pro-democracy mobilization, you're right. I mean, there were members of Nashi photographed and spotted on Manezh Square in December. So it was clear there were government provocateurs happening.

And also, just as a little kind of story to show who the regime is more afraid of, the nationalists or the democrats, at the same time when the [inaudible] were happening—that's December 16th of last year—we had our national conference of Solidarnost in Moscow. And Vladimir Bukovsky, one of our leaders, came to Moscow for this Congress.

And while there were these thugs with metal bars basically beating everybody up on Manezh Square, and the police for the most part just stood by, Bukovsky had—was followed by two stained-glass limousines from the FSB. That's—he said that's the first time it happened to him since 1991, in 20 years; never before.

So while these guys were rampaging yards away from the Kremlin, here is one of the—you know, one of the leaders of the apparently marginal and non-significant pro-democracy movement being followed everywhere he went by two FSB cars, including—they were stationed outside the house where he lived 24 hours, 24/7—in the night, in the morning, in the day. I saw it. It was—you know, it was pretty staggering. I've never seen

that either. You know, and I'm obviously much younger than he is. He'd seen that last 20 years ago. That was the first time he saw it.

But going to your question, Mark, on what to expect, I just want to quote the phrase that Dr. Aron finished his presentation with. One can bend a branch when it's supple and flexible. When it's desiccated, it may snap.

The most interesting thing is what will happen after these so-called elections. If public opinion is any guide, there is a big change coming to Russia in the next few years. It's not going to come from within this corrupt and authoritarian system. It's going to come from—it's going to come from the public somehow or other. And that's—I would suggest that's the most interesting and most important thing to watch in the next few months and years. This election is over before it began, as all of us here discussed. When you don't have opposition parties participating, you can't call that an election.

And I think it's just important to pause for a second and to note that the present Russian regime, which now does not allow any opposition, genuine opposition on the ballot, is, in fact—has, in fact, become less democratic, if I can use that word, than the regimes of Lukashenka, Mugabe, and the late Slobodan Milošević, who did actually allow the opposition on the ballot. They then, of course, rigged the election and beat up on the rest of the opposition, but they were at least on the ballot, including in Belarus, when these horrible events happened last December.

In Russia, you cannot get on the ballot in the first place if you are a member of the opposition, because—this is not—everybody knows this. One of the most—one of the biggest fears of the Kremlin in the last few years, especially since the mid 2000s, was the so-called orange scenario, the color revolution scenario of Ukraine, Serbia, Georgia, where you had an opposition candidate who ran, was elected, but then victory was stolen from him, and then you had thousands of supporters coming out on the streets, and the regimes fell peacefully.

And so the Kremlin actually prevented this scenario from happening in Russia. It cannot happen, because there's no opposition allowed on the ballot. But by closing kind of this way, the orange way, the color revolution, the peaceful way, they may very well have paved the way for something along the lines of Tunisia and Egypt.

And I would certainly agree with Dr. Cohen here. It can be very not pretty when that happens. Nobody wants it to happen. But this regime is doing everything possible to make it happen by closing every normal avenue for communication between the citizens and the government.

Mr. MILOSCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Kara-Murza.

I will let go of my temptation to ask a couple of followup questions. I want to get to Kyle so that he can ask his questions as a professional Russia analyst. But I will just sort of tie together what I heard in answer to my question, that there is a positive hypothesis there, that while things may not seem to be headed in the right direction on the surface, you know, there are currents heading in the other direction beneath the surface. So while the regime can still win, its options are becoming limited. Particularly, long-term trends, a number of long-term trends, seem to be turning against it.

I will turn it over to Kyle right now with the reminder that we need to keep our answers fairly short so that Kyle can ask several questions. And then we'll take questions from the audience.

Thank you.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you, Mark. And, you know, actually if I may, I have a few questions here but I think you all have been listening quite patiently so I would like to open the floor up at this point and take a few questions and I will add mine in as we go along. And we might take one or two in a row. Yes, please. And I think we—Josh, do we have a mic set up—right over there. There's a mic right there. Please go up, introduce yourself and state your question. Thank you.

QUESTIONER. Thanks. Randy Scheunemann, foreign policy consultant based in Washington. I'd like to hear the panel's thoughts on the question of election observers. Traditionally, we support observers so they can document how transparent or non-transparent the election is. But in this case some have made the argument since the election has already been predetermined, all that OSCE or other credible international observers would do is legitimate what is essentially a flawed process. I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you. That's a very timely question. I know those discussions are going on as we speak. And any other questioners like to—take one more question before we turn it over to the panel to respond? It's a pretty good question so I think we can go with that.

Dr. ARON. Very briefly—I think Ariel and Vladimir will have things to say too. But I think observers should be sent. I think Russia should not be exempt from an absolutely normal, civilized interaction with other parties in Europe. Russia is as a—both as itself and also as the legal heir to the Soviet Union is party to a number of treaties that provide for this type of monitoring. And, you know, if the last parliamentary election is any indication, there will be frictions. There'll be cries of unfairness actually on Russian part. They believe that they are being unfairly singled out. But it—I think it raises the—in the end, it delegitimizes this current framework, which ought to be delegitimized.

Dr. COHEN. To my surprise and disappointment at the CIS summit at the beginning of September, President Medvedev, who spoke repeatedly in favor of greater democratization, didn't do much, but at least he raised the issue: the level of the barrier to the parliament, he advocated slightly lowering it. Russia has 7 percent, which is quite high. Only Turkey has 10 percent, which is higher.

So President Medvedev criticized the OSCE observers and said that they apply, if I remember correctly, a double standard in evaluating Russian elections. I remember being an OSCE observer and I found my colleagues from different European countries, Canada and the United States quite fair in what we did—that was back in the '90s.

In any event, he suggested—President Medvedev suggested that the CIS observers would be more relied on. Unfortunately, the track record of the CIS election observers is not always stellar in observing elections in places maybe even more authoritarian than Russia. So I'm actually surprised and appalled how Russia, which is a member of OSCE, would object to OSCE observers.

Having said that, as you know there are two kinds of observers—the long-term observers and the short-term observers. And from my experience besides the manipulation of the tallies, which are very difficult to check, the election days in Russia look very orderly, and in other republics of the former Soviet Union and other CIS countries. What is much more important is—are the long-term missions of OSCE observers. I believe they're 90 days long—3 months.

And this is when people get on the ground and watch the preparation and monitor things like access to the media, access to spaces to have election meetings and rallies, access to printing houses. My acquaintances from different Russian opposition parties complained repeatedly that access to all of the above were disrupted in previous elections. So if there is a mission, it is—I would suggest we boost the long-term mission maybe even at the expense of the size of the short-term mission.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. As one of my friends in the opposition leadership once said, how do you monitor someone not being shown on TV? And I think this goes to Dr. Cohen's point. It's very important—too often, unfortunately—observers even from democracies, even our good-faith observers, they focus on the actual voting day, which does actually—not so now; I mean, since 2007 we really see it as increasingly—you know, the ballot stuffing, the tampering with the early ballots and so forth, and results over 100 percent not just in the North Caucasus but in Mordovia in the 2007 election for United Russia—109 percent to be precise.

But apart from that, I mean, especially in Moscow and Petersburg, election days look normal. But it's very important to note that, for instance as we discuss here, the majority of Russian parties are not allowed to take part in the elections which, you know, to say the least severely limits their nature. The media is overwhelmingly—I mean, biased is not a strong enough word. If you watch Russian TV today and you don't use the Internet or listen to Ekho Moskv, you wouldn't know who is Boris Nemtsov for instance. You wouldn't know who is Garry Kasparov. You wouldn't know who is Mikhail Kasyanov. You just wouldn't have heard of these people because they don't exist for state television.

So this should all be part of the election observations, not just the voting days, not just the—I think the Soviet Union had voting days too, and I'm sure that must have gone pretty smoothly as well, except there was one candidate. And now you have most parties sort of removed.

In terms of sending or not sending, to Randy's question, there's another debate, as you know, within the leadership of the opposition. Some leaders like Boris Nemtsov said, you know, the OSEC mandate is to monitor elections. When there's no election, what do you monitor? And these people say, you know, don't send in the first place because you're just legitimizing a pre-rigged election.

There's another point of view, and I certainly see the use of—for instance, in 2007 the ODIHR was prevented from going but the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and the Nordic Council did go. And that produced a very fair result—a very fair report which did detail and document all the cases of abuse, the confiscation of election literature, the harassment of opposition candidates, the removal of candidates, the—some of the media monitoring. And in a sense it is very helpful to have those too. Even with the caveats that it's not a real election, it's still good to have documented the actual—the actual just, you know, cases of obvious fraud and obvious manipulation.

But I think this debate may, in the end, be useless because it looks like Mr. Churov will just prevent the observers from going anyway because last week he had this—he had a semi-public spat with Ambassador Lenarčič, who heads the OSCE Office for Democratic Institution of Human Rights. And he already said that the proposed number of observers that the ODIHR wants to send is, quote-unquote, “unacceptable.”

And ODIHR wants to send 260 observers this time—for instance, in 2003—that’s the election I ran for the Duma—we had 400 observers from the OSCE and in the ’90s even higher—even higher numbers. Of course nobody had problems with observers and we had real elections in the ’90s. But now even 260 is too much. So I think this debate may just be academic between us in the end because the Russian Central Electoral Commission will just simply not—is not going to allow any observers in, it looks like.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you all. While folks are hopefully thinking of another question I’d like to take this observation discussion in a slightly different direction. Internet freedom is a signature issue of Chairman Chris Smith who has introduced legislation in numerous Congresses. It also is an issue that will be discussed right off the bat next week at the OSCE’s Human Dimension Implementation meeting. And, of course, as you had mentioned, if you don’t listen to the Internet or you don’t have access to the Internet, listen to Ekho Moskvyy—the Internet space in Russia is still fairly vibrant and uncontrolled but it just doesn’t have anywhere near the penetration of national TV.

That said, to my view, even some of, you know, these bloggers, people like Alexei Navalny have had—have had an effect. In fact, this idea to have to—you know they have to go about and create another United Russia because he’s tarnished it and sort of, you know, branded it just the way you’d—you know, you hear advertising slogans on the TV as, you know, the party of thieves and crooks, you know, it’s almost like you expect that to follow after—United Russia: the party of thieves and crooks. And so it had to go and create a new one.

There’s also things that are happening on the Internet—and I recall when he—you know, when they had the elections for the mayor of Moscow, which of course they don’t have any more in Russia, they did have a virtual election and a number of—you know, thousands of people took part. Obviously it didn’t mean anything but he was elected the mayor of Moscow. I’m wondering if the—you know, what role we expect that space to play and if there’s any role there for sort of, you know, domestic self-observation, as it were.

If you’re in the regions and, you know, you happen to be with some friends and you went out to vote and you’re seeing something then, you know, you get—you get churning that up and, you know, Moscow gets attention, it ends up blogged around, it ends up going around the world and being picked up by media outlets. And again as a form of—perhaps an anecdotal form, because it’s not imposing sort of, you know, a rigorous, statistically methodology that the OSCE brings to bear. But I’m just wondering if we—you know, some comments on that.

To that and also with people like Alexei Navalny, who did appear before the Commission at our briefing last year on corporate raiding, also people like Yevgenia Chirikova who we were pleased to be able to meet last week, you know, on the environmental movement. And I often hear from Russia’s young—I’m not really political, but, you know—well, you seem pretty political in the fact that you are caring deeply about either corruption or the environment or, you know, automobile owner’s rights which is—you know, they—been a big issue in Russia.

So it’s interesting how, again, I think we’re dealing with terminology that means different things to different people. So there’s actually lots of politics going on, publicly. But perhaps they’re not what—someone would say, well, I didn’t mean, you know, I’m interested in the Duma or running for that but I am concerned about this. How are those forces coming together and being used? And is that—you know, is that the future of Russian politics? We talk about a safety-valve or a space for things to be discussed.

And with that also—do we have another question that—please, yes. Please. It's helpful if you—yes, it's helpful if you come to the microphone because our event is transcribed and the transcribers here it through the phones. And please introduce yourself.

QUESTIONER. My name is Brian Marshall and I have served with OSCE in the past on a number of commissions, not in Russia but it did include Belarus. And I remember there were some difficult situations there also. And one of the good experiences I had in Belarus was dealing with the domestic NGOs. I felt as though we had good exchanges. Sometimes bad things happened to people who dealt with me. At the same time I did feel that it was some benefit still. And can you tell me about the role of domestic NGOs in Russia?

Mr. PARKER. So domestic NGOs and the Internet.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. [Inaudible.]

Mr. PARKER. Yes, please, yes. If you would like to start we can be rather informal. Yes.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Thanks. Just—OK, thanks. Just to Kyle's point, the Internet is becoming increasingly important for the civil society and opposition just to—you know, just one example. Svetlana Bakhmina was essentially a hostage in the Yukos case. She was a lawyer for Yukos. She was pregnant. She was held in prison. She gave birth in prison. And all the, you know, calls by human rights organizations and of respected figures for her, for clemency and for pardoning, nobody—basically they were ignored.

But after 100,000 Russian citizens, just ordinary people from across the country, signed an online petition with their names, with their addresses—you know, it's not just kind a spam thing, it was a genuinely—genuine civic initiative organized online. After 100,000 people signed the petition she was freed. Of course they didn't—you know, they didn't want to make it appear as if they gave in, it wasn't a Presidential pardon. Basically, it was a court decision but we all know how courts make their decisions in Russia today, especially on the Yukos case and other politically motivated cases.

The Internet audience in Russia is now estimated at 50,000-plus and growing. And it's inevitable that TV censorship will eventually just—at some point will just stop working because there will be—as my colleagues have said, you know, real change in Russia happens when it happens in Moscow and Petersburg and these cities are basically almost fully Internet accessible. And essentially the censorship of the regime is going to stop working. Even if they keep control on TV it will become less and less meaningful.

And also on the question of coupling—your question of coupling the Internet and elections, in 2003—once again, the kind of—this was the campaign that was characterized by the OSCE as free but not fair, and I certainly remember that campaign having taken part in it as a candidate. It was certainly not fair but it was free in the sense we could still have access to the ballot, unlike now. None of us can be candidates now; then we still could.

And the Communists, of all people, organized a parallel vote count on the Internet—actually Ilya Ponomarev who used to work for Yukos and who is now a member of the Duma for A Just Russia, he was with the Communists and he's kind—he was head of Internet projects for Yukos [inaudible] Khodorkovsky's foundation, Open Russia Foundation. He organized this online system, Fair Game—fairgame.ru. I mean, it doesn't exist anymore but that's what the website was.

And basically the local observers from the—from the Communist Party across Russia copied the initial election results protocols—the initial tabulation—which they have a right to do by law being party observers. And then sent them to this one center which tabulated them all and published the results online. So it was a parallel vote count of the actual real election. It wasn't an online election, it was a real election.

And they copied the protocols because, of course, most of the falsifications happen when—it doesn't happen at the very bottom level. The district commissions, sometimes still even today, produce kind of—results that are close to honest. But then when they transfer it above to the regional commissions and to Moscow to the Central Electoral Commission that's when these figures are changed—on the way.

But these guys they collected the initial protocols and they tabulated them on the side and everybody could have access to it. And it was funny because it was the Communists who did it and it showed that their own result didn't change. Their own—the Communist Party result in 2003 was the same—12 percent—was in the real vote count as was in the Central Electoral Commission vote count.

But the Communists did show—I'm not sure they meant to—but they did show that both liberal parties, Yabloko and SPS—especially—SPS it's kind of more doubtful because it was right on the border. But Yabloko certainly did pass the 5 percent threshold in 2003, unlike what the official results showed. And of course the—kind of the reason most people believed the Kremlin decided to lower Yabloko was because they were afraid that they're going to nominate Khodorkovsky for president in 2004 because he was their main sponsor of Yabloko and as a parliamentary party they didn't have the collection signatures for his nomination, because that's of course where the—how the candidates are ejected, when the signatures—

Mr. PARKER. Can—sorry—

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Sure.

Mr. PARKER. Little bit more [inaudible]—

Mr. KARA-MURZA. So this was a very kind of good example of where that can be—where that can be coupled. But not anymore of course because there's no opposition participation now.

Mr. PARKER. Right, right. And others—and I would just add, when you mention the NGOs, well, in the past I think GOLOS has fielded an observation independently inside of Russia.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. They did, but the new law says only registered parties can field observers—so only one of the seven can field observers, not NGOs anymore.

Dr. COHEN. The Russia Internet is, of course, a window and source of—window into the, and source of, great debates and information about political priorities and discussions in the Russian society. I don't know what researchers like ourselves would do if we didn't have access to the Russian Internet, especially those of us who can read it.

However, the Russian Government is taking the events of the Arab upheaval very seriously. I think with no [inaudible] Russia is no Egypt—at least not yet. Russia is no Tunis. Russia is certainly no Yemen, no Syria. But there is either real or feigned fear that Facebook and Twitter and the Internet, LiveJournal for example which is popular in Russia, are going to somehow destabilize the political apple cart.

I actually think the Internet in Russia plays the role of steam valve similar to the Samizdat in the Soviet times. But just as in Soviet times people were jailed for Samizdat,

bloggers like Alevi Kashun get beaten up severely if they're blogging intently or bloggers/whistleblower/anti-corruption crusaders like—what's his name [inaudible] get served subpoenas to prosecutor's office.

The Internet is a tool. It is value free, I believe. And the Internet itself is not necessarily an agent for change. The Russian Government understands that, other governments understand that too. Not only Internet can be censored, the Internet can be used by government supporters—especially when they're paid and there's a large department of trolls—the trolling department—that put hundreds if not thousands of people online to argue the government case. If you read what the trolls are saying, it's not very impressive. But it does exist, and not everybody has the critical-thinking facilities on at all times.

So I think the Internet is interesting as the means to understand better and more in depth, to get more granularity of the debates in Russia. You have nationalist sites, you have ultranationalist sites, you have rather nasty discussions and arguments on Facebook or in LiveJournal, but the bottom line is, it takes more than that—regardless of what the Russian government thinks, it takes much more than that to rather launch a revolution or—orange or otherwise.

Dr. ARON. Very briefly, it's very gratifying for me, Kyle, that you took us in this direction in two regards, that—a field study that we did in Russia in July—and the results will be published, I hope, at the end of the year—where we traveled literally across from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad. And we met, incidentally, with those who organized the largest protests. We met Darashok in Kaliningrad, we met with Abidinov in Vladivostok, and so on and so forth.

The second—the second reason this is gratifying for me is because—is the role of the Internet. I started out thinking like Ariel. This is—this is just a valve. And we've come to the conclusion that it's already an extremely effective tool of self-organization of civil society.

Valloy does point about, you know—and we're not talking about national politics. Every organization—we studied in depth six organizations, some of the most interesting ones, including the Automobile Owners of Russia and so on—all of them, by the way, started as totally nonpolitical; they would like to remain unpolitical but they're pushed into politics and that's very interesting because the framework within they would like to achieve dignity and fairness is constantly invaded from above. So, in any case, there all kinds of nuances. I'm writing a lot about this, and you'll see it.

But the point is that the Internet—and here's the difference with Samizdat—it's a very good point, Ariel—it is Samizdat, part of it is Samizdat, but part of it is also sort of—I don't know what to call it—sort of—Samizdat—the mix of Samizdat—and it comes from all meeting. It's—in other words, yes, it's Samizdat, yes, you could read a lot of things, but this is how society self-organizes. Absolutely, there is—there is absolutely no doubt. Every one of them—this is a very interesting type of organization. Some of us studied organizational theory. They're extremely fluid. This is something totally new. The membership could be 10, 12 people. Yet, through Internet, they could—they could mobilize 3,000, 4,000 people within hours.

So Internet is extremely important. And the real—the really interesting question is at what point the government will begin aggressively restricting and manipulating it.

And this, by the way, reminded me of one point that I didn't make, which is that, as Mark mentioned, you know—what to look for? Well, look for—immediately in the run-

up and perhaps after—for at least some sort of dress rehearsal of shutdowns. In fact, you know, some people will—they already took place. There were, as you know, hacker attacks on Nova Vrema—

Dr. COHEN. And the LiveJournal.

Dr. ARON. And the LiveJournal. They were brief. The perpetrators were never found. But yet, some of our, you know, colleagues, whom we respect, firmly believe that this is—including Masha Lipman—they believe that this is a—this was a rehearsal—how to shut down some particular subversive sites on a—on a very short notice.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Just a quick note: Earlier this year, the FSB has openly suggested banning Gmail and Skype in Russia because they cannot monitor it. They cannot—they have no technical ability to intercept it. So it was—it was an FSB spokesman—

Dr. COHEN. No, no, no, Vladimir. This was an information operation, disinformation, from FSB to push people to Skype and Gmail—

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Perhaps.

Dr. COHEN [continuing]. That FSB can read—

Mr. KARA-MURZA. I think you're giving them too much credit.

Dr. COHEN [continuing]. But it'll be easier for them to monitor so people think that they cannot monitored, so they'll say whatever the hell they want.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. I think you give them too much credit for that, but—

Dr. COHEN. I'm kidding.

Mr. PARKER. Well, since we've been talking a little bit about Samizdat and other things, one of the things I find so, I don't know, beautiful, if you will, about Russia, is the great sense of humor and the ability to laugh at a gut level. And it's also one of the things I enjoy in my own country, when an election season gets going, is the political humor.

And sadly, it seems that humor, at least in certain levels in Russia, has fallen on hard times. I know that, you know, the show Cokly is no longer on the air—

Dr. COHEN. After Chernomyrdin died—I mean, this really—

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. For some time—but to be sure, the jokes continue to circulate.

And not only that, I'm thinking also of this move—this knock-knock operation, this move to spoil ballots or write things on them. I—I'm not sure if it was true, but I remember it when I was studying Russian at Norwich; someone had told us that one of the greatest studies of—it was a beautiful story, at least—of Soviets—of Russian foul language, was a look at spoiled Soviet ballots and what sort of the citizens [laughter]—might have written on them. And I'm just wondering if there's anything that we can learn there and if there is nuggets of wisdom to be drawn from that and sort of the national mood.

Dr. ARON. Obviously—you know, it's—I don't have them with me. We did write down a few.

It's a disturbing sign, by the way, that the political jokes are back. They disappeared in the '90s because you could write about everything, and moreover, you could say everything, especially about the political leaders. It's gone now. It's gone underground.

On the other hand, some of us who've been nostalgic for this type of output are really reveling in it. And some great political jokes are back. Unfortunately, I don't—I don't remember any now.

Dr. COHEN. Well, I think, if I'm not mistaking, they canceled the option of voting against all candidates.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. 2006, right.

Dr. COHEN. So, in the Soviet tradition and post-Soviet tradition for a while, you could come to the ballot box and then cross a category, voting against all, which is protest vote, essentially.

Now that they cannot do it, there are some voices—I read on the Internet, people are calling to spoil the ballots. So as Kyle suggested, some people come and write—how should we put it—censor the language on the ballots, what they think about candidates or their parents.

Mr. PARKER. Their mothers.

Dr. COHEN. I don't know if this is a good tool for political protest. And therefore, I think it's important to watch if the attendance, participation in the election is going to drop because in the Soviet Union, they didn't force you—they didn't drag you to the ballot box. They came to knock on your door and said, go vote, and my parents would say, thanks, we already voted, or, we're sick, or something like that. So my parents always made a point not to go vote. Today, I don't think they're doing that. You don't vote, you don't vote. If a lot of people don't come to vote, then questions will arise as to the legitimacy of the vote, I would imagine. Well, this is something to be watched and monitored.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Yes. And one of the reasons they don't ask people anymore is just, usually, in the last half an hour of—they just—of the voting hours, they just sign for people who didn't come in, cross their ballots for United Russia and put it in. That's—hence the things like the 40 percent turnout for Matviyenko in the last hour because they see who's not coming, maybe who didn't come for previous years, who is not likely to come; they just sign and they do it. So—

And turning to this knock-knock thing and everything else there, I mean, this is not going to surprise you. There is no unity in that democratic opposition.

Mr. PARKER. Knock-knock, by the way, for those who don't understand, is—well, it's untranslatable, shall we say. [Laughter.] It's not as innocent as what it sounds in English, the knock-knock.

Dr. COHEN. But it's not “knock”—it's not a K, it's a KH—

Mr. PARKER. Right—yes, it's right. [Laughter.]

Dr. COHEN [continuing]. Which has a different—

Mr. PARKER. That's what I meant.

Dr. COHEN. See Leon for the translation right there.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. But part of the opposition is doing this. They called to spoiled ballots, which is essentially against all.

Another part of the opposition says, don't bother coming to the polling places at all. Some other people say, come and vote for any party except United Russia to lower their results. But certainly, you know, any of my friends and colleagues are never going to even symbolically vote for Zyuganov or Zhirinovskiy even if that means lowering Putin's vote. So it's not—that's not the most popular option.

And in terms of—I completely—Dr. Leon Aron said, you know, as unfortunate as this—kind of this—the trend of, whenever the political jokes return, that means the situation is getting worse. But one of the—one of the—kind of the recent one is, Putin comes

to a restaurant with Medvedev and Gryzlov, the Speaker. And the waiter comes in and he says—and he asks, what are you going to eat? He says, meat. And he writes down meat and says, what about the vegetables? And Putin says, well, the vegetables are going to have meat. [Laughter.]

Dr. COHEN. [Inaudible.]

Mr. PARKER. You know—well, the questions from you all in the audience, please. That's why we hold these open forums.

I would like to ask about demography. Demography is a subject the commission has been examining this year. And, obviously, Russia is a place where, at least sort of the—the story most are familiar with is that the demographics are bad. Certainly, they're changing. They're changing here, and that's something that's paid attention to rather extensively in U.S. politics as to where the vote might be going in the next cycle or the cycle after that or 10 years out.

I know there was a—what—when I—I think we had a naive view some years ago that it would—it would require the changing of a generation and that the younger generation would—somehow would show up and would vote for whatever—whatever it was that was—liberal democracy and openness and transparency. And then there were a number of papers and studies that—perhaps younger Russians were even more nationalistic than older Russians, looking at views about Stalin and that period of history.

So I'm just wondering, is there anything there that we should be paying attention to—and with particular focus, I guess, at the North Caucasus, which, again, is a region, always, of special interest in Russia and of special interest to this Commission? We certainly have looked at issues in the North Caucasus extensively for many years. And I can't think of another government operation in town that has done as much—and all in the open source and, you know, producing reports and transcripts. So if we could maybe speak about that a little bit.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. Do you want me to—

Mr. PARKER. Whoever wants to jump right in.

Dr. COHEN. We are working on a report on the insurgency in North Caucasus at Heritage. So a lot of research was done. And looking at demographics, religion, ethnicity, conflict, I think there is a systemic problem for the Russian state that they really don't know how to address. As we marked the 10th anniversary of 9/11, I think a lot of Americans can certainly sympathize with people who suffer from terrorist insurgency, from attacks on civilians, et cetera.

But terrorism is one component. What goes beyond that is the inability of the Russian state to, A, integrate people—peoples, plural—nationalities, ethnic groups—Muslims—of North Caucasus into the broader Russian polity. There is, if anything, a deeper divide, I think, between those who identify themselves as Christian Orthodox Slavs and those who identify themselves as non-Slavic Muslims. And this divide is not always a—hardly always violent, but nevertheless, in terms of identity politics, it's broad and getting broader. The gap is getting broader. It's point No. 1.

Point No. 2 is that the extremists in Northern Caucasus, the so-called Jamaat, are communities of Salafi—what the Russians call Wahhabi Muslims—who develop totally outside of the state. They're barely integrated or not integrated at all. They're hostile to the state. They use violence. They're engaged in shaking down business people or govern-

ment officials. They kill law enforcement officials. They take hostages for ransom, et cetera, et cetera. It is a very difficult situation.

And listening to what the Russian leadership has to say about it, when the leadership calls these people criminals, yes, technically, from your St. (Petersburg ?) Leningrad law school perspective, they violate the law so they're criminals. But I do not hear from the Russian leaders attempts to put it in a broader Islamist radicalism context, something that Americans are dealing with all around the world. There's a shallow understanding of that. The Russian experts or self-appointed experts either put out bromides that say, oh, Islam never had any problems with Christian Orthodox—Russian Orthodox Church, or they say—to paraphrase Putin—wag them. The answers are very extreme and are not workable—do not produce workable policy as to how to deal with these citizens of the Russian Federation.

And the law enforcement, of course, has its own huge share—law enforcement and the military—have their own share of problems: corruption; violence; again, lack of understanding of the religious, historic, ethnic and political problems that represent the North Caucasus variety of peoples and their histories.

More importantly, it is—not a taboo, but it is a really unpopular topic to discuss failed policies in the past in the Caucasus, in North Caucasus, be it the very harsh tsarist policies in which the Circassians, the Circass or others were pushed to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire or exiled, and hundreds of thousands were killed, or the Soviet era policies in which peoples in the North Caucasus such as Chechens and Ingush were deported for no clear reason whatsoever by Stalin in a genocidal deportation to Siberia and Central Asia, and between 20 and 30 percent of them died within probably the first couple of years. Then they were allowed to return, but the trauma of that deportation, of course, is still with them.

So it is a very painful issue. It's a dangerous issue. And the demographics are working against the ethnic Russian population because the fertility rates in the North Caucasus are times two, times three higher than inside the Russian Federation. So while today, it's still somewhere maybe 20—10-plus percent of the population, when you're looking at the cohorts of kids, age, you know, 1 to 5—7—today, that difference is probably—I'm guessing now 30 percent are North Caucasus Muslims.

Dr. ARON. Kyle, let me—

Mr. PARKER. Yes, please, Dr. Aron.

Dr. ARON [continuing]. Very briefly: You know, I've written a paper recently about the Internet [inaudible] use the Internet and was told a tale of two nations. Demography is probably the clearest defining factor in the use of the Internet. And by that, I mean age.

So when we talk about—now, again, you know, people are asked constantly, you know, are you a regular user? You know, how often you use it? Where do you get your news? And it's almost an inversion: people over 50, 95 percent from television; people under 30, not 95 and not to this level, but at least half from the Internet.

Now, that, again, could be a force of good—for good or a force for bad. However, again, barring some sort of major crackdown on the Internet, you could see an important and traditionally politically most charged part of the population people between 20 and 40.

Getting out of the informational control, that presents very serious problems. Again, they could—they could turn out to be completely nonpolitical. In fact, as everywhere else, young people in Russia, when they surf Internet, they're not just looking for political news; they're looking for all kinds of other things.

But however, just the very habit of turning to Internet before you turn on the television set could spell some very interesting developments. The regime will have to try and control it or open up television, and neither is a particularly attractive or technically doable option.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Hi, just a quick note. It's worth remembering that those who are—who have turned of voting age this year, those who will vote for first time, they were 6 years old when Putin became Prime Minister. So when you, Kyle mentioned that sometimes, you know, these—the groups, kind of the younger groups are more nationalist and more anti-Western, then it's not really that surprising because all they've seen is the state propaganda, the one party basically in parliament, the anti-Western rhetoric like Putin's [inaudible] speech, the infamous speech in 2007, and all the rest of it. So I believe—

Mr. PARKER. I believe there's a [inaudible] speech this weekend. [Inaudible] schedule.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Another one, well, we see what happens in that one.

But it shouldn't really be surprising, but as Leon mentioned, Internet does become increasingly important. So—and we certainly see, in opposition rallies and in our meetings, we certainly see many young faces too. It's not like—you know, it's not a one-way thing, but it's just going to take time to change.

Mr. PARKER. We have about 10 minutes left, and I guess there's no real reason for us to use it all, if there aren't any other questions. I certainly could go and on and [inaudible] with my questions. But I'd like to make sure everybody has an opportunity. We've had a rather interesting and free-ranging conversation today on the topic that—like I said, I do expect we'll address again.

Please, yes, up to—

QUESTIONER. I'm Mitchell Pullman. Like Brian, I've also been involved with OSC issues. He touched on this earlier, but I—I'm just curious. I'd like to hear a good more about this group, Golos. I mean there were some groups back in the '90s that were election-observing the Kremlin dissidents, and I only heard about them just recently. I don't know how they are organized.

Mr. PARKER. Vladimir, do you want to take that?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Sure. Golos is very—it's a very important group. It's kind of the NGO umbrella that includes several different subgroups and participants that usually try to monitor elections. But the main difference is in the '90s, NGOs and kind of social public organizations could send monitors to elections too. Now they cannot.

The recent changes in the law restricted monitors to registered parties and also registered media outlets. So TV states and newspapers can send journalists, but even that restricted law is being violated all the time. Like, for instance, once again, this Matviyenko election in St. Petersburg, there was a period of time, an hour, 2 hours, when even the official observers were simply kicked out, and nobody knows what happened in that hour or 2.

So it's—and it's increasingly meaningless, you know, to try to monitor these fake elections and, as I say, even the very restricted possibilities are violated everywhere. But Golos tries its best. They're good faith, honest people. They're not—you know, this—it's

not a front group or anything like that. It's a genuine NGO that—we've worked with them as well in the past. They had a—they held a big international conference in the—on elections in Russia a few years ago in Moscow at which many—in which many of us participated and I think they work with some American and western NGOs as well, partner with them. But what they can do in this situation is very restricted.

Mr. PARKER. I might just add, along the lines of the importance of NGOs in election observation, as I think probably most of you know, the OSCE is considered the gold standard in international election observation. But what's not as well known is that the methodology they use was developed in the late '80s, early '90s at NDI and our Ambassador to Russia nominee, Ambassador—going just recently the nomination was sent up—Mike McFaul was at NDI in those years and has some campaign experience himself. So again when he—if and when he gets on the ground, pending advice and consent of the Senate, certainly would bring some valuable experience as this campaign unfolds.

I think I might finally sort of close on the note—I have some notes here, and I'm trying to think. Lilia Shevtsova, a respected commentator in Russia, I believe I recall a couple months ago a piece she had written that to me seemed to strike this tone of sort of, it has to get worse before it's gets better, and that, you know, there might be some who sort of are under the assumption that, well, those of us in sort of the liberal Western democratic, keeping commitments [inaudible] I would think, sort of the basis of our work here is sort of, commitments are made, commitments must be kept—but that, you know, those who might be relieved to see that, oh, our worst fears didn't materialize and, after all, Medvedev is coming back and it won't be Putin, that I think she was writing somewhere along the lines that that's not really [inaudible] that in a sense far better for—if Putin's the real power in Russia, far better for him to assume the post and have that accountability and to sort of remove this confusion, this rhetoric that, you know, again—

Dr. ARON. Good cop, bad cop thing.

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. Right, that gives many pause because he said we have heard some great things and, you know, Medvedev indeed over a number years—and I would say that, you know, and the Soviet Constitution probably wasn't that bad neither [laughter]. But, you know, just—at the same time, the notion of saying something like, well, you know, it has to get bad—it has to get worse before it gets better, and what that might mean in a country as large and complicated as Russia, again, strikes me as almost a little callous and perhaps academically irresponsible to speak about a population of people and say, well, you know, could we be plunged into a sort of an Arab Spring-like scenario and what would emerge from that?

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. Arabs.

Mr. PARKER. Again, I think that's rather unclear. So again, just comments on that and also to sort of add, you know, does the reset survive Putin's return? And should, you know—is it in any way legitimate to sort of grade that and how should a negative election season both in December and March and what it means for the legitimacy of our partners, how should we view that? And where does—you know, sort of what are the implications of the policy?

Dr. ARON. Yes, very briefly [inaudible] you know, we talked about the—I think you already—your question already had an answer there, Kyle.

It is, I think, the context in which these—this election cycle is taking place is different from the previous three, both politically, economically, socially. I think we will see

a greater assertion by civil society of its rights. Nobody—nobody can predict how those things turn out. It's impossible. The timing is always a miracle.

But in terms of the reset, the only thing I could say is that I think—I think, on both sides, it's been—it's been sort of weighed down with the things that really were not there. I think as—I don't know if it was a real reset or [inaudible] there's a—clearly Russia did what—what's in its interests. Anybody who expected that the reset would lead to a genuine confluence of purpose of—is a priori wrong because the values are so divergent. This is not 1990s where at least the values were converging. So, you know, if people are disappointed—you know, Russian intellectuals, Russian liberals are disappointed that, you know, the U.S. is not doing more for them. The pro-government people are accusing the—you know, the reset of being—of being a Trojan Horse. This is all—this is all fluff. This is all unrealistic.

I think—I think, in the relationship between the two nuclear superpowers, each of them is very calibrating its interests. Where they coincide, you have a reset. It's not called "reset," it was called detente, it was called something else, but that's where we are. And I think—I think it's unrealistic to expect more of it—more from it or accuse those who started it off, you know, sort of not fulfilling the expectations. I think—I think, if the expectations were there, it's those who expected things that ought to review their positions.

Dr. COHEN. I think that with all due respect to Lilia, whom I value as an incisive observer of the Russian political scene, she is overdramatizing things a little bit because whether Mr. Medvedev stays or not, the show is run by Mr. Putin regardless. And whether Medvedev—if Medvedev stays as President, which I think is probably less 50 percent likely, but even if he does, his operational authority is going to be curbed even more than it's curbed already today. And he will play ceremonial roles that Mr. Putin, for whatever reason, doesn't feel like playing—he's bored or if he doesn't have time.

The two scenarios that I'm hearing is that Medvedev stays with this very limited authority or he's gone. There are other options for him. My favorite one, to suit his temperament, is the President of—Chairman of the Constitutional Court in St. Petersburg. Another option some people are saying now is he's going to be the Speaker of the Duma. I don't know. I have no—I'm not privy to any inside information on that, but as I said, people are throwing all kind of trial balloons. Think there's something very cynical about all this speculations: who it's going to be, who it's not going to be. There's a lot of—there's a lot of complaining going on in Russian elites, which value clarity as to where they are going to put their—in which baskets they're going to put their eggs.

In terms of the reset policy, I have written five web memos—was it four?—web memos—five web memos criticizing the reset policy, which are all available on the Heritage Web site [heritage.org]. I think that putting all the eggs into Medvedev's basket on the behalf of the Obama administration was very short-sighted. We provided concessions; we got very little back. Some stuff that we got back was good, like the—solidifying the supply line to Afghanistan. But other things like Iran, Russia was kicking and screaming and now are going back. Just today they made an announcement of the sale of several new nuclear reactors to Iran, I'm told, and on other issues, we did not have any advance or any progress like U.S. policy in the former Soviet Union, I think the Obama administration de facto recognizes the Russian privileged sphere of interests in the former Soviet Union, as Mr. Medvedev called it.

We compromised our values, our defense of democracy and human rights; this is what this hearing was about, and the same [inaudible] made an argument that the reset policy is dead. How it can survive the transition to the post-2012 Russia and post-2012 United States remains to be seen, but it is indicative that the anti-American sentiment in the Russia media, in state-controlled television—this is not a freelance television; this is all very scripted and state-controlled—and anti-American sentiment there in discussion panels, in film, in documentaries, in every genre of television that I watch, these anti-American repeat again and again and again. And as a result, we have a generation of young people in Russia that are more anti-American than anybody in the '70s—in the '80s, late '80s or '90s.

So, as Leon pointed out, when interests coincide, great powers make deals. That's not a reset. This is not what reset pretended to be. It is great power politics as usual, going back 2,000 years. And that is going to continue between the United States and Russia hopefully. We're not going to come to blows. But with this political arrangement in Russia, when I think they're looking for an external enemy to justify the continuous and not so democratic rejuvenation of power or legitimization—legitimization of power. This external enemy or these external enemies—be it Estonia—at different points in time, Estonia, Georgia, or the United States—that serves the powers that be quite well.

Mr. KARA-MURZA. In terms of what [inaudible] I'd certainly agree they would be more honest if Putin becomes president again and, in a way, this has been a brilliant PR operation with Medvedev, the quote-unquote "liberal president" who says these nice words on TV and that the only three concrete things he's actually achieved in domestic policy was increasing the Presidential term from 4 years to six, creating the "Center E"—the East anti-extremism center, so-called, at the ministry of internal affairs, which is essentially the equivalent of the KGB fifth directorate, which monitors political dissent—and the third one was the second sentence—trial and sentence on Mikhail Khodorkovsky—the three concrete political things he's done, despite all his rhetoric about freedom being better than nonfreedom and all the rest of the nonsense.

So it'd be certainly more honest; it would certainly take the cover off from the eyes of a—still amazingly a significant part of Russia's kind of liberal establishment that still hopes for some change from above instead of being more actively involved in the—in the opposition and the civil society. So in this way—in this sense, it would actually be in some way helpful for the self-organization of prodemocracy forces in Russia in Putin is—drops the pretense and comes back to the Kremlin next May.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. Tres bien.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. In terms of the gets—the "gets worse before it gets better," it certainly sounds—certainly sounds certainly cynical. You're right, Kyle. And certainly as I already mentioned, none of us, you know, want anything like this and with—that's the whole point: It's the regime that drives the country to something like a Tunisia or an Egypt by shutting off, as we discussed, all the valves and all the normal avenues. We would—we would like to change power at the ballot box as all other normal countries do it.

And in terms of the reset, I agree with my colleagues completely, they can—how can you have a reset if the values have absolutely nothing in common? And I think the only genuine reset, without quotation marks, between Moscow and Washington will be when Russia continues—begins to at least move toward the values of democracy and rule of law and human rights and just the values of our common civilization.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. Yes.

Mr. MILOSCH. Back to Mr. Cohen, Dr. Cohen?

Dr. COHEN. I just wanted to give you one example of could have been achieved and wasn't in this whole give and take between the United States and Russia.

President Obama asked President Medvedev, in one of the meetings, so I'm told, to look into the Khodorkovsky affair and hopefully get Mikhail Khodorkovsky after what—7 or 8 years of a jail term. The answer was, from Mr. Medvedev, I hear you, and the American counterparts were led to understand that something will be done.

Something was done. Mr. Medvedev rebuked his Prime Minister Mr. Putin for interfering before the verdict and—when Putin, on national television, said that Khodorkovsky has to sit in jail, blah-blah-blah—and said that this was inappropriate, that executive branch should not interfere into the ongoing judicial procedure and then after Khodorkovsky, regardless, was sentenced to a lengthy jail prison, Medvedev came out publicly and said—and I'm paraphrasing—that he does not represent a public menace or a threat to public order.

Medvedev is a lawyer, and he's a genuine lawyer in the Russian terms, and saying that somebody does not represent a threat to public order means that that person does not—there's no reason for that person to be kept in jail. So the signal was loud and clear. Unfortunately Mr. Medvedev could not engineer the—either release or pardon of either Khodorkovsky or his partner [inaudible] and this is just an example how limited the reset was and is and will be.

If the United States interfering in one high-profile case cannot bring about what administrations from Ronald Reagan on managed to do vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, get somebody released—Vladimir Bukovsky—Bukovsky was released by the Soviets in an exchange for, I believe, a spy or a—

Mr. KARA-MURZA. No, a Communist—Chilean Communist leader.

Dr. COHEN [continuing]. Communist leader. Corvalan?

Mr. KARA-MURZA. Corvalan.

Dr. COHEN. For Chilean Communist leader Luis Corvalan. So this is—this is the limit. This is how limited that thing is.

Mr. MILOSCH. We are going to have to wrap up quickly. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off; were [inaudible].

Dr. COHEN. [Inaudible] yes, I'm done.

Mr. MILOSCH. [Inaudible.]

Dr. COHEN. Thank you.

Mr. MILOSCH. I think we've had an excellent discussion. Thanks to all the panelists. I'm a—

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. [Inaudible.]

Mr. MILOSCH. We have a lot to report to the Chairman and Co-Chairman, our Commissioners. I'm sure the Commission will be making itself heard as we move forward through the cycle of the next two Russian elections—

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. Mr. Milosch?

Mr. MILOSCH. With that, on behalf of the Chairman, I'd like to thank our panelists for the excellent, intelligent discussion, Kyle Parker and Josh Shapiro for organizing the panel and you for coming today. Thank you. [Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 4 p.m., the briefing ended.]



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