

# Moscow abuzz with 'post-Yeltsin' talk

by Konstantin George

The question of what comes after Russian President Boris Yeltsin, whose political fortunes are decidedly on the wane, burst into the open in late July in the Russian press. The spate of articles, which also raised questions about Yeltsin's health, began July 29 in *Pravda* and *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, organs respectively of the diehard old Communist and Russian ultra-nationalist opposition to Yeltsin. Yet this was no mere opposition mud-slinging. A spokesman for the pro-Yeltsin Democratic Russia movement confirmed on Aug. 2 that shaping the succession has become a priority for that organization. By Aug. 4, the succession had become the headline story in the leading "moderate" daily, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.

The intensifying succession debate reflects a deep transformation under way in Russian policy. That shift can be denoted on two pivotal counts: 1) the onset of a sharp break with the "shock therapy" policies which have ravaged the economy for the past 18 months; and 2), in typically Russian style, the stepping-up of a "Great Russian" policy of recreating the empire by grabbing in stages, whether by annexation or as protectorates and spheres of influence, nearly all of the old U.S.S.R.'s territory.

## Captive of new policy?

Yeltsin himself reappeared in public Aug. 4, flying down to the south-central Russian city of Oryol for the 50th anniversary of the 1943 Battle of Kursk, which marked the turning point on the Eastern Front. More important are the decrees he signed during his "non-appearance," which made him the "executive vehicle" for the policy shift since July 13. Some highlights:

1) Yeltsin authorized the military to use all force necessary in the war in Tajikistan.

2) At the end of July, in response to military demands, he preemptively ordered the sending of an additional 5,000 troops to the explosive North Caucasus region of North Ossetia and Ingushetia, in expectation of new outbreaks of ethnic conflict.

3) In the two statements (July 26 and Aug. 4 in Oryol) on the ruble reform, he has endorsed the action of the Central Bank and Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin.

4) Decrees made public Aug. 4 signal that Yeltsin will back the next round of Russian pressure against the Baltic republics. He postponed the final withdrawal of Russian forces from Lithuania, previously set for Aug. 31, and issued a presidential pardon for Sergei Parfyonov, the former deputy commander of the U.S.S.R. Interior Ministry OMON special units in Riga, Latvia, responsible for the January 1991 attack on the Latvian Interior Ministry building that killed at least five people. Under heavy Russian pressure, Parfyonov was given an early release on July 31 from a Latvian prison and deported to Russia.

Senior western authorities on Russia and the most serious of the continental European press have realized that the shift is irreversible, regardless of personality considerations in the Russian leadership. The second, or imperial feature of the shift, was expressed by Prof. John Erickson of Edinburgh, in an article for the *World Policy Journal*, as "the gathering of the Russian lands unto Moscow." This phrase, "the gathering of the Russian lands," was used to describe Russian policy in the lead editorial Aug. 4 of the south German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, titled: "The Empire Comes Back."

## Rejection of 'shock therapy'

The growing break with shock therapy—the radical free-market measures to withdraw all government direction and support for the economy—was initiated through the ruble reform, as reported in *EIR* last week. The pattern can be documented in two news developments which have been little noticed in the West. The first, as *EIR* already reported, was the July 29 announcement by First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Lobov, a loud opponent of shock therapy, that Russia was launching its largest infrastructural program in years, budgeting 1.2 trillion rubles for housing construction and road building. This was followed by a Russian government announcement, covered quietly by Radio Moscow on Aug. 1, which reported that "construction has begun on the high-speed rail line between St. Petersburg and Moscow" and that "completion is scheduled for 1999."

In a Radio Moscow interview broadcast Aug. 2, the deputy director of the top economic think-tank IMEMO defended the ruble reform as something that "had to be done," though saying that it "could have been done better." The interviewer, citing the opposition of Finance Minister Boris Fyodorov, asked, "Isn't the cabinet split?" The reply was: "The cabinet has always been split, from the beginning," making it clear that the Fyodorov group, loyal to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), had lost. The questioner protested that "western governments are not in favor of the ruble reform," and have indicated they may withhold aid promised through the Group of Seven. "Isn't Russia risking" a cutoff? The reply was blunt: "No," Russia is risking nothing because "Russia has not received a penny of the promised aid," and "if any money ever arrives here . . . it will be much less than promised,

and we won't even start to see it until many months from now."

### The succession question

*Pravda* and *Rossiskaya Gazeta* reported certain incontestable facts that suggest Yeltsin is either in a political twilight, or very ill, or both: In the last three weeks of July, there were no appearances of Yeltsin in public. Televised coverage of him was confined to archive pictures, with two exceptions. At the July 26 meeting of the Russian Security Council, distant views of a Yeltsin with a noticeably puffy face were shown briefly. The same was true on July 29 in his meeting with leaders of the North Caucasus regions of North Ossetia and Ingushetia. A July 27 engagement to speak before a Youth Congress in Moscow was cancelled at the last minute, and the usual weekend TV interviews were omitted, first because of his "vacation," and then, after his return to Moscow on July 25, with no reason given.

*Pravda* had reported on an emergency meeting of the leadership of the pro-Yeltsin Democratic Russia movement, saying that these leaders were afraid that Yeltsin could be incapacitated, and feared that under the present Constitution, power would automatically pass to Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy, one of Yeltsin's harshest critics. Spokesmen for Democratic Russia heatedly denied the health rumors, but confirmed that the succession question is being posed. They declared that Democratic Russia was pushing as priority the early conclusion and ratification of the new Constitution, with special emphasis on its succession clause, which mandates immediate elections, thus thwarting Rutskoy's rise to power.

By Aug. 2, the succession struggle broke into *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, in a lead article by Viktor Marsov, which described Yeltsin's conduct of late as "more than odd" and was titled: "August 1993: Nervous Anticipation. Who is controlling the situation in Russia? Again there's no answer." Marsov wrote, "Rumors most unpleasant for the President and dangerous for the country are spreading over Moscow. These rumors have been circulating for months and months, but of late they have become a real factor of the real but still underground political struggle." Who controls the situation in this country and how? "There is no reply to this situation and by this irresponsibility the situation of August 1993 is highly similar to that of August 1991," a reference to the coup attempt during Gorbachov's reign. "The deployment of forces is different—the misgivings are the same." Marsov added that Yeltsin's "decisions have been either completely lackluster or contradictory. One has the impression that no one knows what the President is thinking about existing problems."

A banner headline in the Aug. 2 leading German daily, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, announced, "In Moscow, the signs of a Yeltsin severe illness are multiplying." The article, written by the paper's well-informed Moscow

correspondent, Elfie Siegl, begins: "Signs to be taken seriously speak for the fact that Russian President Yeltsin is gravely ill and limited in his work and decision-making capabilities. As can be heard from several sides, in the past three weeks, 'contrary to expectations,' Yeltsin's health condition has so worsened that he is hardly the master of the situation in the country."

By Aug. 3, the Presidential Office was forced to issue a denial, saying that the President's health is "normal." This was followed by announcements that Yeltsin would leave Moscow Aug. 4 to visit Oryol, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the victory in the Battle of Kursk. Then, it was reported, Yeltsin would host Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Moscow Aug. 5 for a meeting to plan a Moscow summit of Central Asian heads of state and prime ministers.

The dual agenda of that meeting is to expand the Russian-dominated "Economic Union" agreed to in July among the three Slavic republics (Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus), to cover most or all of the Central Asian republics of the former U.S.S.R., and to coordinate actions concerning the war in Tajikistan.

### 'Barannikov affair' boxes Yeltsin in

The cutting edge of the power play to make Yeltsin, if he survives politically, the figurehead of the new policy, is the unresolved "Barannikov affair." This refers to Yeltsin's firing in late July of the Russian security minister, who had acquired hard evidence proving that the leading personalities around Yeltsin were lining their pockets in illegal financial deals. According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* article, information was leaked that the decree firing Barannikov was drafted by Yeltsin's entourage and simply handed to Yeltsin for signature. Those targeted, beyond those accused of corruption, include the head of the Presidential Office, Sergei Filatov, and Yeltsin's closest aide, Sukhanov, who accompanies him on all official trips, as well as on vacation. The other targets, whom Barannikov had dossiers on, are deputy prime ministers Vladimir Shumeiko and Sergei Shakhrai, plus the head of the Russian Information Agency, Mikhail Poltoranin, and former State Secretary Gennadi Burbulis—all close friends of Yeltsin.

Additionally, Andrei Makarov, a Moscow lawyer whom Yeltsin had named in July to head the "Inter-Institutional Commission of the Security Council for Fighting Crime and Corruption," was identified by correspondent Siegl as a crony of Shakhrai, Burbulis, and Poltoranin. The Makarov appointment was a clear attempt to sidestep Barannikov, so as to protect the Yeltsin clique, and played a key role in igniting the "Barannikov affair." The paper also stressed that the fallout from the Barannikov affair extends into the military, citing the Defense Ministry daily *Krasnaya Zvezda*, that the removal of Barannikov had struck hard in the Security Ministry, causing "consternation and a panic-like mess."