

In Tune With Putin's Rooseveltian Thrust

by Rachel Douglas

The likely outcome of the upcoming Russian leadership transition became suddenly clearer on Dec. 10, when First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev was nominated by four political parties to succeed Vladimir Putin as President of Russia. Those parties include United Russia, which got 64% of the vote in the Dec. 2 Parliamentary elections, with Putin at the head of its slate. The Presidential election is scheduled for March 2. If he is elected, Medvedev said, he is prepared to name Putin as Prime Minister.

Medvedev, age 42 and educated in law, has been a close collaborator of Putin for 17 years. As First Deputy Prime Minister for the past two years, he has been in charge of four National Projects: housing, agriculture, health, and science, while simultaneously serving as chairman of the board of Gazprom. The four areas for which Medvedev was responsible were the sectors most devastated by the dismantling of Russia's economy in the 1990s.

A common, simplistic categorization of possible successors to Putin often places Medvedev as the "liberal" among them, contrasting him to the defense- and intelligence-connected First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, or the tough manager Victor Zubkov, whom Putin named premier this Fall. A review of Medvedev's own public statements on matters of strategic importance, however, reveals him addressing them in terms similar to those used by Putin, with the same emphasis on a Rooseveltian "great project" solution as most promising. These include the global financial crisis, and a "Eurasian" solution to threats against Russia's own territorial and political integrity.

At an *EIR* seminar in Berlin on June 27, 2006, Prof. Stanislav Menshikov highlighted remarks by Medvedev about the ongoing world financial crisis. Menshikov said:

"I think maybe in the West very few people noticed a statement made by First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Dmitri Medvedev—who might be the next President of Russia, by the way. . . . [A] couple of weeks ago, at an economic forum in St. Petersburg, Mr. Medvedev made a very important statement about the world economy. . . . One of the things I thought very important is the fact that he says that if we go along, integrating into the world economy—and that's the term he used, 'we want to integrate into the

world economy'—but, if we want to integrate, we can't go on with the monetary system that exists now, because it is based on a system that has too big fluctuations in exchange rates. He didn't say exactly that he wanted to have fixed exchange rates. But I think that that was a very important statement, showing that the Russian government is coming to the point when they realize that reform in the monetary system is needed."

A year later, in front of a July 21, 2007 meeting of the youth group Nashi, Medvedev warned that the crisis of the U.S. dollar "may become general and global in nature." Interfax reported that he then said, "A situation may arise where we, China, and some other Asian countries will talk about the emergence of a regional reserve currency. That may be the yuan, but it is in our interest that it be the ruble." At the June 2007 St. Petersburg Economic Forum, President Putin had also suggested that the time has come for multiple world reserve currencies, including the ruble.

Medvedev on Roosevelt

In a Nov. 2, 2007 interview with Interfax, Medvedev was asked if there needed to be additional national projects like the ones he oversees. He replied in historical terms: "You know, a national project emerges when society and the state encounter big problems . . . [for example] the agrarian reform of 1861 [Tsar Alexander II's ending of serfdom] or the reconstruction of the national economy after the Great Patriotic War [World War II]. In the space of three or four years, we pulled our enormous country out of ruins. . . . And there were examples in other countries. I think that even the famous New Deal of U.S. President Roosevelt at the end of the 1920s-early 1930s can be considered an American big National Project—the project to get out of the Depression."

At the end of the 1990s, Medvedev added, Russia, too, was in a depression, "connected with the collapse of the previous state and the economic, and even emotional lack of preparedness for the changes that happened," and the concept of the present national projects was created to meet this challenge.

Speaking at the Davos World Economic Forum in January 2007, Medvedev said, "The Russian economy will fully take up our historical mandate as the energy and transportation center of Eurasia." Without action on that mandate, Medvedev believes, Russia could see a depopulated Siberia slipping out of its control. In an April 2006 interview in *Expert* magazine, Medvedev said, "If we do not develop our eastern regions, Russia will not survive as a single whole. This is a simple truth. There is also the very obvious and difficult demographic situation. We absolutely must do something to boost the population in these regions. Otherwise, the Far East will be a cold, empty, and neglected place, or someone else will develop it instead."