

# Russia after the elections: Calls for “reforms” and negotiations with imperialist powers grow louder within the oligarchy

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The Russian presidential elections on Sunday ended with a clear victory for incumbent President Vladimir Putin, who is now set to go into his fourth term, putting him in complete control of the Russian government for another six years.

The weeks before the election had been dominated by the imperialist campaign over the Skripal poisoning, in what amounted to an overt provocation and attempt to pressure the Russian oligarchy, both with regard to its foreign policy and its economic policies.

The voter turnout had initially been reported to stand at just 60 percent, which would have been the lowest percentage in any presidential election since 1991. However, on Monday morning Russian officials dramatically revised the figure upward to 67 percent without providing much of an explanation. According to the final official results, Putin received 76.7 percent of the votes, the equivalent of some 56.4 million people. This was significantly more than in the last presidential elections in 2012. Significantly, Putin won about 70 percent in Moscow and St. Petersburg, two cities which, as centers of the narrow upper middle class and oligarchy, have traditionally been bulwarks of the liberal opposition.

The multimillionaire Pavel Grudinin, who ran for the Stalinist Communist Party of Russia (KPRF), received 13 percent; the far-right nationalist Zhirinovskiy 6 percent. Ksenia Sobchak, a mouthpiece of a section of the Kremlin that seeks a negotiated settlement with US imperialism, received only about 1.5 percent of the votes, despite an extensive well-publicized campaign. This is the equivalent of about 1.25 million votes, which, as some pro-Putin commentators scathingly noted, was about four times less than the followers on her Instagram account. The head of the liberal opposition party Yabloko received fewer votes, only 0.9 percent.

The fact that Putin could win the vast majority of votes despite the fact that the past few years have since a massive deterioration of the living standards of the working class and broad layers of the middle class, is above all an expression of the deep hostility toward the liberal opposition. This “opposition” is associated with the worst social crimes of the 1990s, and collaboration with the blatant efforts of imperialism to encircle and carve up Russia.

However, in stark contrast to these sentiments, the sections of the oligarchy that support Putin see the election result first and foremost as giving it an improved bargaining position in its desperate attempts to find a negotiated settlement with US and European imperialism. For them, the election result means a green light to press ahead with the very policies of the liberal opposition toward which the vast majority of the Russian population has expressed its hostility. This clearly emerges from a series of commentaries that were published in the wake of the election on the pro-Kremlin website *Vzglyad*, and in the more business-oriented *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.

Thus, Andrei Kolesnik, a state дума deputy of the ruling United Russia party and former member of the Russian navy’s special forces, celebrated Putin’s electoral victory in a commentary for *Vzglyad* as the beginning of the “spring” after “four years of Cold War.” According to Kolesnik, now was the “chance to reconcile.”

“We have to thank Theresa May, in particular. In the two weeks before the elections she convincingly showed to the Russian voters how successfully Putin defends the interests of his country in foreign policy. This powerful vote of confidence will make the West understand: there is no sense in waiting for a different, more convenient negotiator to appear in the Kremlin. And this means, the

moment to reach an agreement has come. The Western leaders now have a wonderful opportunity to tell their voters, without losing their face: not all of us like Putin, we do not like everything about Russian politics—but we will accept it as it is.

“Without the participation of Moscow none of the global political problems can be solved. ...Our relations have come to a dead end. And this means we inevitably need to seek a compromise. All the more since Putin is precisely the kind of man who holds his word (unlike many of his international partners). He is someone you can find an agreement with (s kotorym možno dogovaritsia).”

*Nezavsimaya Gazeta* was even more blunt. In an editorial, it acknowledged that the vote reflected overwhelming hostility toward the liberal opposition, which now finds itself and its positions in an extreme minority, but then it concluded: “However, now that he has received the mandate from his voters, Putin will be forced to engage with the actual agenda, the sharpness of which is better understood by those who have lost in the elections. In other words, in one way or another he will have to base himself on the minority—on those who voted for the liberals or did not take part in the elections at all, or who support Putin but were frightened by the second half of his [State of the Nation] Speech. To take into account the interests of the minority means, above all, to create conditions for it to express itself. Including on a political level.”

Another commentator for *Vzglyad*, Petr Akopov, announced that, “Putin’s new presidential term will be a time of change, the scale of which will outstrip everything he has previously done.”

In his Speech on the State of the Nation on March 1, Putin, before warning the imperialist powers in a calculated show of military strength of Russia’s newly developed nuclear armed weapons, had announced that he planned on enacting a series of economic reforms which, in the spirit of the liberal opposition, were aimed at creating conditions for “free competition” among businesses, and a reduction of the role of the state in the economy. In other words, he announced that he was willing to make far-reaching concessions to the demands of the liberal opposition and imperialism to open up the Russian economy much more to foreign capital. Any such concessions will be bound up with massive social attacks on the already impoverished Russian working class. (See: Putin’s state of the nation speech highlights crisis of Russian oligarchy)

These developments confirm the warnings of the WSWS about the reactionary nature of the Russian oligarchy as a whole. Having emerged out of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the destruction of the Soviet Union, which it carried out hand in glove with imperialist institutions and governments, the Russian oligarchy has no, nor has it ever had any, independence from imperialism.

As the WSWS wrote back in 2000, on the occasion of the second war waged by the Kremlin in Chechnya, “the threat posed by the growth of US militarism cannot be combated on the basis of the Great Russian chauvinism being whipped up by Putin and his allies in the military. Any support for the war by working people will only strengthen the hand of their own oppressors and the very government through which the international banks and industrial conglomerates seek to dominate Russia. The aim of the Kremlin in Chechnya is to reassert Russia’s Great Power status, strengthening their bargaining position with the imperialist governments and Western banks and thereby maintaining their right to share in the exploitation of the Russian and Caucasian peoples.” (See: The political and historical issues in Russia’s assault on Chechnya)

While the imperialist encirclement of Russia and the systematic attempts to undermine it economically and politically have since massively escalated, the essential strategy of the Russian oligarchy around Putin has remained the same: whipping up Russian nationalism and feigning to defend “the interests of the country,” while seeking above all to strengthen its bargaining position with the imperialist powers to continue and expand the exploitation of “its own” working class.

A struggle against the danger of an imperialist carve-up or invasion of Russia, and of a new world war, can only be conducted in opposition to all forms of Russian nationalism and the oligarchy, including the sections Putin represents. It requires an international unification of the working class on a socialist basis and, as part of that, the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Russia.



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