

types. The first are ideological supporters of democracy, for whom freedom is the supreme value even if the country goes to hell in a hand-basket. They tore down the Soviet Union, and given the chance they would do the same to the Russian Federation. Next come the adherents of the oligarchical model, for whom the citizens of this country simply don't matter. All they want is money and power. The third group is made up of Russia's enemies who understand that when properly applied, managed democracy helps the country to develop and lays the foundation for normal democracy. That's the problem -- They fear a strong Russia. Last but not the least are the friends of Russia, Western businessmen, who simply fear that managed democracy could lead the country down the wrong path. They must be drawn into dialogue.

The Kremlin's approach to democracy can be illustrated in terms of freedom of the press. In principle, the regime supports a free press, though it understands that the media are always dependent on something: the state, private owners and financial reality. And profitable media outlets in Russia, such as commercial radio stations and entertainment magazines, are already free. The regime shouldn't meddle in their affairs. All media outlets should strive for such financial independence, but most are hampered by meagre advertising revenue -- the result of Russia's low standard of living and its influence on the advertising market. This forces the media to seek out political money. The regime accepts that quality outlets, such as the newspapers *Kommersant* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Ekho Moskvy* radio, are controlled by its political opponents, and even helps them indirectly by keeping the price of paper and equipment artificially low. But in current situation, with political parties weaker than ever, television is not just another sector of the media. It is a weapon for spreading propaganda. Therefore, Putin issued an ultimatum to private interest groups: Disarm, and only the state will wield the weapon of television.

The transition to a free press requires that we build the economic foundation for the advertising market. The bigger the ad market (assuming an independent judiciary), the freer the media, just as developing democracy in Russia today means creating the economic, administrative and legal foundations of democracy. When we have achieved economic growth, a competitive market, an improved standard of living and we have rid the bureaucracy of corruption, the transition to democracy will occur automatically.

This theory has been very influential in the Kremlin, but the events of recent months indicate that it's not entirely accurate. Left to its own devices, managed democracy doesn't automatically lead to full democracy because it entails a simultaneous increase in fervid loyalty to the regime. This is how all the large bureaucratic systems are built. But the rise of hyper-loyalty can outpace the building of democracy, as demonstrated during the parliamentary election campaign last fall. The public has grown increasingly annoyed with the propaganda broadcast on state television, and this annoyance, created by the bureaucrats, is opening a gap between Putin and the voters. People like Putin and his policies, but they're turned off by the way the television showers him with praise. Low voter turnout in March would reduce the legitimacy of Putin's second term, and that would be a blow for the country.

One thing became clear after the State Duma elections: You can't rely on the political superstructure to automatically follow the movement of the economic base. That's primitive Marxism. Rather, the Kremlin must promote the growth of civil society and of pluralism -- including the opinions expressed on state television. It's time to introduce a system of advisory committees for the state channels like those that help shape policy at the BBC.

At the end of Putin's second term, stability should be based not on the president himself, but on stable institutions: a competitive market and democracy. This is Putin's mission in the next four years.

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