

# Letter From the Editors: Oct. 17-23, 2016

## Taking the High Ground: This Week's Lip Service, Laughs and Lectures From Russia.

The "high ground" seems to be a persistent motif in this week's Digest coverage: The Russian leadership has managed to stare down, tease and even lecture the political movers and shakers of other countries without drawing unwelcome attention to its own vulnerabilities.

The most geopolitically grand gesture is that Putin attended the [first "Normandy Four" meeting of 2016](#) in Berlin, thus showing that (1) he's not an international pariah and (2) he's in solidarity with the West in paying lip service to the Minsk agreements for settling the protracted conflict in the Donetsk Basin. At this point, implementing those accords puts more burden on Ukraine than Russia, as Tatyana Stanovaya points out: Kiev has a mountain of political and legislative work to do – for example, reforming the Ukrainian Constitution and working out a procedure for elections in the separatist regions – while Moscow has the luxury of simply waiting for it to slog its way along.

Meanwhile, the Russian media are in a feeding frenzy over allegations that the [US election](#) is being rigged. Alex Gorka notes (with a mixture of incredulity and glee) that these allegations come from Republican hopeful Donald Trump in particular: "Just think about it – the leader of a major political party believes that the US voting system is flawed! The candidate has said that some people voted despite being ineligible, some cast ballots many times and some impersonated dead voters." This last item likely elicits laughter from Russian readers, who are well acquainted with the outrageous scam in [Nikolai Gogol's 1842 novel "Dead Souls."](#) In addition, there must be a certain *Schadenfreude* with respect to recent history: Recalling the mass protests and claims of fraud that swept Russia after the [2011 State Duma elections](#), we can imagine that Trump's allegations about the US system must be music to the Kremlin's ears.

Even more rife than speculations about anti-Trump factors in the election are stories in both the Russian and American media that [Putin is pushing for a Trump victory](#). This idea gathered steam during the summer, when Russian hackers released e-mails that compromised Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's reputation. Adding fuel to that fire this week is [Konstantin Kosachov](#), chairman of the Federation Council's international affairs committee, who excoriates Clinton's campaign article (published in Time magazine Oct. 13) titled "Why America Is Exceptional." Kosachov labels the article "propaganda," calls it "a culture shock" for the rest of the world, and even takes on a moralistic tone, making a thinly veiled reference to Nazi Germany: "[T]here have been no maxims of this kind and at this level probably since the 1930s and 1940s. We remember very well where talk about the 'exceptionalism' of one particular nation led the world at that time, and what price it had to pay."

Another Russian legislator who took the moral high ground this week was newly elected [Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin](#) (formerly Putin's aide), when he responded publicly to an invitation from PACE president Pedro Agramunt to resume work with the European parliament (from which Russia resigned last year after being stripped of its voting rights). While Volodin acknowledged the need for dialogue, he pointed out that Russia has no business participating in PACE without the right to vote: "Parliament is a place for discussion – a place for dialogue, for expressing viewpoints." He added: "I mean, look at how the Russian parliament is structured. We have factions that don't hold a majority, but participate in discussions on all issues." The irony of this statement cannot be lost on informed Russian readers, who undoubtedly recall the infamous remark by Volodin's predecessor Boris Gryzlov: ["The parliament is no place for discussion!"](#)

Honoring the Russian custom of using proverbs to sum up a situation, there are two that come to mind here: "Turnabout is fair play" and "Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." We leave it up to you to choose which is more fitting!

Laurence Bogoslaw,  
Copy Editor

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