

Letter From the Editors: Dec. 12-18, 2016

Socialism Without a Corrupt Face.

Staunch Kremlin critic Aleksei Navalny has officially announced an unofficial presidential bid. The high-profile statement raises a lot of eyebrows, questions and faint hopes among Russian political observers. [Tatyana Stanovaya](#) writes that the Kremlin has three options for dealing with Navalny, ranging from tough to brutal, and it will most likely favor the latter, since it is in no mood to put up with shenanigans – especially by the likes of Navalny – during a period of geopolitical turbulence. Putin went easy on him three years ago, when the corruption fighter was convicted on embezzlement charges but given a suspended sentence. But the circumstances have changed in the post-Crimean era. Stanovaya says that “in March 2014, Putin crossed an invisible line, beyond which the Machiavellian logic of ‘the end justifies the means’ has become more pronounced and uncompromising. What was unimaginable before 2014 is now a reality.” So is Navalny signing another arrest warrant by going toe to toe with his stalwart foe?

[Yevgeny Karasyuk](#) comments that while in many respects Navalny and Putin couldn't be further apart, they are almost kindred spirits politically – oddly enough. Navalny's proposed campaign platform is very similar to Putin's, and their statements on many key issues almost identical. Assuming Navalny is allowed to run, he would presumably be a populist candidate in the Putin mold. Just whose interests Navalny would be championing remains to be seen: businesspeople, the middle class, pensioners, the elite. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* writes that for now he is simply displaying the most alluring goods he has for sale for each group. What he most definitely isn't selling is full-on Western-style liberalism. NG writes that classic economic liberalism is foreign to Russia, and Navalny won't be able to peddle it to the populace unless it is tightly wrapped in a populist/socialist package. This isn't surprising, since socialism in one form or another has been the prevailing political fashion in Russia for ages, and it is unlikely to change any time soon.

A Just Russia party chairman [Sergei Mironov](#) would certainly agree. In an article with the not-so-subtle headline “Do We Need a State Ideology? Yes We Do!” he bemoans the fact that Russia's Constitution bans a state ideology – a restriction he believes is unraveling Russia's moral fabric. He argues that although the Constitution prohibits a state ideology, it nevertheless tacitly supports one of patriotism and socialism. He cites Art. 7 as an example of this “state ideology”: “The Russian Federation is a social state whose policy is aimed at creating conditions that ensure a dignified life for human beings and their free development.” Mironov feels Russians are becoming disoriented without an explicit ideology of national patriotism founded on socialist principles.

Russia's socialist bent partly explains why the sudden [sale of a 19.5% stake in state-run oil giant Rosneft](#) strikes many as fishy. At the gut level, many Russians consider the sale a betrayal of Russia's inherent social interests: the idea that state companies and their subterranean resources belong to the people. But the announced [deal is fishy](#) for a whole lot of other potentially pernicious (“oily”?) reasons, and likely only Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin knows whose palms are getting “greased.” Suffice it to say that a lot of seemingly random cards fell into place at just the right moment to give a boon to some unknown beneficiary at the cost of the Russian federal budget and the taxpayer's wallet. We might not know the faces and exact value of those cards, but to call a spade a spade, corruption has proven to be just as fashionable in Russia as socialism. But maybe Navalny could change that.

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