



EVALUATION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS TO THE STATE DUMA IN RUSSIA

The 7th legislative elections for the State Duma, which is the Lower House of the Russian Parliament, were held on September 18, 2016. According to the results of the Russian Central Election Commission, 47.82% (namely 52,631,849) of 110,061,200 registered voters participated in the elections and the United Russia Party won with 54.20% of total votes (28,527,828). According to the Constitution, the Russian Parliament (Federal Assembly) consists of two chambers – the State Duma and the Federation Council (art. 95). The legislative power of the State Duma can be distinguished mostly in terms of functions and powers. Whereas, the Federation Council looks like a Senate that mostly acts as an advisory and representative body. According to the Constitution, the State Duma consists of 450 members. The Federation Council includes two representatives from each of Russia's federal subjects: one from the legislative and one from the executive body of the state authority (art. 95). Accordingly, in the Russian Federation, which has 85 federal subjects, the Federation Council includes 170 members. The President of Russia has the right to appoint 17 members of the Federation Council (art. 95). The Federation Council is the organ that works on a permanent basis (art. 99). According to the Federal Law on the Procedure for the Formation of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation dated December 3, 2012, terms of the members of the Council are not nationally fixed, but instead are determined according to the regional bodies the senators represent. (art. 1). Russian citizens who are over the age of 30 years and who are legally eligible can be a candidate for senator of the Federation Council (art. 2).

The members of the State Duma are elected for five years (art. 96). Any Russian citizen who is over the age of 21 and has the right to participate in elections can be elected as a deputy of the State Duma (art. 97). A mixed system is implemented in the parliamentary elections according to the Federal Law on Elections of Deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation dated February 22, 2014. Accordingly, 225 deputies of the State Duma are elected in single-seat electoral district (one district – one member) and other 225 deputies are elected by a proportional representation system (art. 4). According to this law, in order to be elected to the State Duma through the party lists the candidate's party needs to receive at least 5% of votes (art. 88).

During the 6th parliamentary elections held on December 4, 2011, only 4 out of 7 political parties were able to overcome the 7% threshold. Out of all 65,656,526 electoral votes, the United Russia Party received 49.32%, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation

received 19.19%, the Just Russia Party received 13.24% and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia received 11.67% of total votes. As a result, the United Russia Party took 238 seats, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation took 92 seats, the Just Russia Party took 64 seats and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia took 56 seats in the State Duma.

The parliamentary elections to the State Duma coincided with the period of strained international relations between Russia and the West, especially the U.S., over Syria and increased socio-economic problems in the country. Because of the different aims and interests of the parties in the context of the Syrian issue, the US-Russia relations are expected to continue to be strained. On the other hand, the heads of the U.S. and the Western countries have expressed their concern over the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) established under the leadership of Russia. They perceive the EAEU as an organization, by which Russia can strengthen its position and authority in the world through its immediate environment (post-Soviet countries). This is why the Western countries have supported Ukraine's EU-oriented policies instead of the EAEU-oriented ones.

Economic sanctions imposed by the Western countries to Russia combined with the drop in oil prices have shaken the budget of Russia, whose economy is dependent on oil and gas revenues. According to data published by the Federal State Statistics Service, at the end of 2015, 19.2 million people were living in poverty below the minimum wage, which is 13.4% of Russian population. According to some experts, the amount of the Russian citizens living in poverty are forecasted to rise by 3 million people if there is no increase in oil prices. These circumstances carry the risk of deteriorating Russia's internal stability and increasing the number of citizens who are dissatisfied with the government policies. Indeed, on February 26, 2016, Russia's President Vladimir Putin had a meeting with the Federal Security Service Board expressing his predictions about a political turmoil that might occur in the country with the influence of external forces before the elections. At the meeting, Vladimir Putin stated that foreign intelligence agencies widened their activities in Russia and he gave additional tasks to the Intelligence Department of the Federal Security Service to increase security in the country and prevent provocations from outside. In short, the Russian head officials paid special attention to the implementation of necessary security measures aimed at preventing an increase in activities of the groups influenced by external forces that want to take advantage of difficult social and economic situation in the country before the elections. In this re-

gard, on April 5, 2016, in accordance with the Decree №157 the Federal National Guard Troops Service was established and statesmen, who have an authority in the military forces, were appointed as governors in some subjects of the Russian Federation. Therefore, the 7th elections to the State Duma were conducted in this complex environment.

As for the elections results, 4580 parliamentary candidates participated in the elections. Four parties were able to overcome the 5% threshold: the United Russia Party gained 54.20% of votes (28,527,828), the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia took over 13.34% (7,019,752) and 13.14% (6,917,063) of votes respectively and the Just Russia Party got 6.22% (3,275,053) of votes. Thus according to party lists, the United Russia Party won 140 seats in the State Duma, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation received 35 seats, while the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and the Just Russia Party gained 34 and 16 seats respectively.

According to the results of elections in the 225 single-member districts, the distribution of seats are as follows: the United Russia Party – 203 (79.6%), the Just Russia Party – 7 (2.7%), the Communist Party of the Russian Federation – 7 (2.7%), the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia – 5 (2%), the Rodina Party – 1 (0.4%), the Civic Platform Party – 1 (0.4%) and Independents – 1 (0.4%). Overall as a result of the elections, the United Russia won 343 seats (76.2%), the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and the Just Russia Party gained 42 (9.3%), 39 (8.7%) and 23 seats (5.1%) respectively, while other parties took 2 seats (0.4%) and the independent candidate gained 1 seat (0.2%) of the total 450 seats in the State Duma. The most active participation in the elections was observed in two regions: the Tuva Republic (90.13%) and the Kemerovo oblast (86.80%). Whereas the least active participation in the elections was in the Irkutsk oblast (32.92%). 874 representatives from 63 countries and 10 international organizations and more than 260 thousand local observers monitored the Russian State Duma elections. International institutions such as SCO, CIS and local observers that monitored the election process reported that the parliamentary elections were held in a free and democratic environment.

To conclude, the ruling United Russia Party achieved to increase the number of its seats compared to the previous elections by 69% (+105). This means that the ruling party can easily enact the laws that they want with the help of their deputies in the State Duma and can prepare the legal ground for the activation of Russia's foreign policy designed to ensure its leading position in the multipolar world.

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan announced signing protocols with Kyrgyzstan on 55 border areas within Namangan, Andijan and Ferghana regions of Uzbekistan, adjacent to Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken regions of Kyrgyzstan.
- During his visit to Yerevan, the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, and the President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, exchanged views on a number of international and regional problems being of mutual interest, including the current situation in Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking.
- During his visit to Tbilisi, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, and the President of Georgia, Giorgi Margvelashvili, discussed issues of further strengthening of cooperation. Moreover, the parties signed agreements on intensifying the relations in economy, security and education. It was the first official visit of Kyrgyzstan's leader to Georgia in the history of the Kyrgyz-Georgian relations.
- The participants of ministerial meeting in Lausanne on Syrian issue confirmed their strong support for preserving Syria's territorial integrity and made a focus on the goals of restoring the ceasefire regime in Aleppo and in Syria in the context of the Russia – US agreements reached in Geneva in September.
- During the 5th EU – Azerbaijan Justice, Freedom and Security and Human Rights Subcommittee meeting, the parties discussed the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan in the field of migration, border management, as well as the rule of law and judicial cooperation.
- The UN General Assembly unanimously appointed the former Prime Minister of Portugal, Antonio Guterres, as the next United Nations Secretary-General for a five-year period to succeed Ban Ki-moon when he steps down on December 31, 2016.
- The Government of Turkey extended its state of emergency for another three months. The extension was advised by the National Security Council of Turkey.
- The NATO press service announced its plans to develop a new Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) to expand its cooperation with Azerbaijan.
- During the Collective Security Treaty Organization Summit held in Yerevan, the leaders of member-states decided to set up a joint crisis response center to exchange information on common threats, including terrorism.
- According to the State Security Service of Kazakhstan, three people suspected of planning attacks against the country's security services have been arrested in Almaty.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- On the sidelines of the 23rd World Energy Congress, Russia and Turkey signed an intergovernmental agreement on the implementation of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline project, according to which the parties envisages deliveries of Russian natural gas to Turkey and Eastern Europe. According to the agreement, the parties agreed to construct two parallel lines of the pipeline through the Black Sea with the capacity of 15.75 billion cubic meters of gas each.
- The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) agreed to finance the construction of the Turkmen section of the Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan – India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline. The IDB will provide to the county \$700 million loan for 15 years for the construction purposes.
- The Minister of Energy of Azerbaijan, Natig Aliyev, stated that there is a necessity to hold negotiations with Kazakhstan on the issue of construction of a 739-kilometer Eskene – Kuryk – Baku oil pipeline via the Caspian Sea, which would enable Astana to export its oil to Georgian and Turkish ports. The new pipeline's capacity could amount to 23-25 million tons per year with the possibility of a future expansion to 56 million tons.
- According to the Ministry of Energy of Kazakhstan, the first batch of export oil from the Kashagan oil field in the amount of 7,000 tons was piped via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium. Moreover, 18,800 tons of oil were shipped through a pipeline operated by the state-controlled company KazTransOil and 22.8 million cubic meters of gas were transported to the pipeline system of Intergas Central Asia. It was also noted that four wells of the field is producing a total of 12,600 tons per day.
- During his official visit to Tashkent, the First Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Askar Mamin, and his Uzbek counterpart, Rustam Azimov, discussed the current state of bilateral trade and economic relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In addition, the parties signed a protocol to extend economic and trade cooperation between the countries highlighting to increase the turnover from \$3 in 2015 to \$5 billion in the medium term.
- During the 1st round of the trade dialogue between Belarus and the Directorate General for Trade of the European Commission, the parties signed an agreement on cooperation in the establishment of the trade dialogue.
- The General Administration of Customs of China reported that the trade turnover between Russia and China grew by 0.4% in the annual terms to \$50.27 billion over the first three quarters of 2016. Russian export to China grew by 7.1% over the same period to \$26.98 billion while import decreased by 6.4% to \$23.3 billion.
- The national railway operator Kazakhstan Temir Zholy reported that the railway administrations of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Georgia signed a memorandum

of Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) Association and adopted its charter. The Association will aim at attracting transit and foreign trade cargo to the route, as well as at the development of TITR's integrated logistics products. The association's office will be located in Astana.

- According to the First Vice Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, Mukhammetkaly Abulgaziev, in 2015 China became one of the main trade partners of the republic and occupied the second place in the total turnover with 18.5% amounting to more than \$ 1 billion.
- The State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan reported that 23,616 new small business entities (excluding farms) were created in Uzbekistan in January-September 2016. The amount of small business entities reached 215,801 units, which is 5.8% increase year-on-year. The share of small businesses in industrial production of the country reached 43.8% in January-September 2016 compared to 38.7% at the same period of 2015.
- According to the Vice Minister of Agriculture of Kazakhstan, Kairat Aituganov, the country has gathered the best grain harvest in its post-Soviet era history. It was noted that in 2016 the Kazakh farmers harvested 23.1 million tons of grain compared to 20.3 million tons of grain harvested in 2015. About 17 million tons of grain was collected in the main grain regions such as Akmola, Kostanay and Northern Kazakhstan.

Society and Culture

- During the meeting of the Azerbaijani Parliamentary Committee on Legal Policy and State Building and Public Associations and Religious Organizations, officials discussed the new changes proposed to the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan, according to which foreigners and persons without citizenship, carrying out ceremonies and rites pertaining to Islam, will be fined.
- The Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan and the United Nations Children's Fund signed a cooperation plan for 2016-2020. The plan will help to implement the Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy and achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- The Senate of Uzbekistan approved the acting President Shavkat Mirziyayev's proposal for a mass amnesty of prisoners. The amnesty was adopted in honor of the Constitution Day, which is marked on December 8.
- The experts of the needs assessment mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights had a meeting in Uzbekistan's Central Election Commission (CEC) during which the Chairman of the CEC, Mirza-Ulugbek Abdusalomov, informed in details about the work carried out for preparing and holding the presidential election.