

CONFIDENTIAL PTQ3262

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 06626 01 OF 04 200359Z
ACTION EUR-01

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-01
	DINT-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DOTE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00
	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	VC-01	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01
	L-00	MCO-01	MOFM-04	MOF-03	M-00	AC-01	NRRC-00
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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9520
INFO MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
CIS COLLECTIVE

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(D), B6

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 006626

HELSINKI PLEASE PASS TO ST. PETERSBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/17/10
TAGS: PGOV, PINR, RS
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS -- ONE WEEK
TO GO UNTIL THE REFERENDUM ON PUTIN

CLASSIFIED BY GEORGE KROL, MINISTER-COUNSELOR FOR
POLITICAL AFFAIRS. REASONS: 1.5 (B,D).

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 06626 01 OF 04 200359Z

SUMMARY

1. (C) RUSSIA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ARE, IN
ESSENCE, A REFERENDUM ON ACTING PRESIDENT VLADIMIR
PUTIN. MOST OF THE VOTES CAST COULD BE CHARACTERIZED
AS VOTES EITHER FOR OR AGAINST THE INCUMBENT. VOTERS
WILL REGISTER THEIR DISPLEASURE WITH PUTIN OR THE LACK
OF AN ALTERNATIVE EITHER BY STAYING HOME ON VOTING
DAY, BY VOTING "AGAINST ALL," OR BY SUPPORTING ONE OF
HIS MAIN RIVALS -- KPRF LEADER ZYUGANOV OR "YABLOKO"
LEADER YAVLINSKIY. THE RESULTS OF THE "REFERENDUM"
ARE IMPORTANT, BECAUSE AS PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: FRANK H PEREZ
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 19 MAR 2015
DATE/CASE ID: 05 SEP 2007 200702380

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OFFICIALS EXPLAIN, PUTIN NEEDS A STRONG SHOWING ON MARCH 26 IN ORDER TO ENSURE HIS LEGITIMACY AND TO GIVE HIM A FREER HAND IN IMPLEMENTING POLICY. DESPITE A RECENT SLIPPAGE IN SUPPORT FOR PUTIN, ACCORDING TO SOME POLLS, HE APPEARS STILL ON TRACK FOR A FIRST ROUND VICTORY. END SUMMARY

NO WORRIES?

2. (C) PUTIN'S MAIN OPPONENTS IN THIS RACE ARE NOT ANY OF THE OTHER CANDIDATES. INSTEAD, THEY ARE A POTENTIALLY LOW VOTER TURNOUT AND A POTENTIALLY HIGH "AGAINST ALL" VOTE, ACCORDING TO [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
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B1, B6

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 06626 01 OF 04 200359Z
TOLD POLOFF ON MARCH 14 THAT WHILE IT IS LIKELY THAT PUTIN WILL WIN IN THE FIRST ROUND, THAT IS NOT ENOUGH. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR HIM TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE HAS THE CONFIDENCE OF THE POPULATION. (NOTE: SOME RECENT POLLS SHOW SUPPORT FROM PUTIN HAS SLIPPED TO 53 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. OTHERS STILL SHOW HIM WITH OVER 60 PERCENT SUPPORT. END NOTE) [REDACTED] SAID HE FEARED THAT VOTERS WOULD BE APATHETIC, VIEWING THE RESULT AS PRE-DETERMINED. FOR THAT REASON, THE KREMLIN IS PUSHING HARD TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO GO TO THE POLLS. [REDACTED] SAID THE "AGAINST ALL" VOTE WAS DANGEROUS, BECAUSE IT CAN BE INTERPRETED AS NOT AGAINST A CERTAIN PERSON, BUT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.

3. (C) [REDACTED] THE "VOTE 'AGAINST ALL'" INITIATIVE [REDACTED] IS INTENDED TO BE "DANGEROUS." THE GOAL IS FOR THE "AGAINST ALL" VOTE TO BE HIGH ENOUGH THAT PUTIN WILL FEEL SOME CONSTRAINTS ON HIS POST-ELECTION ACTIONS. CONCEDED THAT PUTIN PROBABLY WILL SCORE A FIRST ROUND VICTORY, [REDACTED] WOULD HAVE PREFERRED THAT YELTSIN NOT RESIGNED, ALLOWING "REAL" ELECTIONS TO TAKE PLACE IN JUNE. [REDACTED] BELIEVED [REDACTED] INITIATIVE WOULD BE VICTORIOUS IF "AGAINST ALL" GARNERS 4 PERCENT OR MORE OF THE VOTE.

ELECTORAL STATE OF PLAY

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4. (C) [] ESTIMATED THAT ONLY 5-6 PERCENT OF THE
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PAGE 04 MOSCOW 06626 01 OF 04 200359Z
VOTE IS UP FOR GRABS, AND THE REAL STRUGGLE IS FOR
THAT PORTION OF THE ELECTORATE. HE PREDICTED THAT
THOSE VOTES WOULD BE SPLIT BETWEEN PUTIN, ZYUGANOV,
YAVLINSKIY, AND "AGAINST ALL." BETWEEN NOW AND THE
ELECTION, PUTIN WOULD CONTINUE TO TRAVEL TO VARIOUS
REGIONS AS PART OF HIS CAMPAIGN. [] EXPRESSED
DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THE PUTIN CAMPAIGN IS FORCED TO
PAY FOR PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK OF PUTIN INTERVIEWS
WITH "KOMMERSANT" JOURNALISTS FROM THE CAMPAIGN FUND.
THE CAMPAIGN HAD DECIDED NOT TO PAY FOR ADVERTISING
AND HAD HOPED THAT THE BOOK WOULD NOT BE VIEWED AS
"AGITATION."

5. (C) [] SAID THAT TWO ISSUES FROM THE
BEGINNING HAVE LOOMED AS POTENTIAL TRAPS FOR CANDIDATE
PUTIN -- CHECHNYA AND WAGES/PENSIONS. HE SAID THE
KREMLIN VIEWS NEGATIVE MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHECHNYA AS
DIRECTED AGAINST PUTIN AND THE MILITARY. (NOTE:

[]
NEVERTHELESS, TOLD US THAT PRESS COVERAGE OF THE
CHECHEN CONFLICT IS MUCH LESS CRITICAL AND
COMPREHENSIVE THAN IN THE 1994-96 WAR. END NOTE)

[] SAID PICKETING AT THE WHITE HOUSE BY DOCTORS,
TEACHERS, AND OTHER PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS WHO HAD NOT
BEEN PAID SET OFF ALARM BELLS IN THE KREMLIN.
THANKFULLY, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MATVIYENKO HAD BEEN

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL PTQ3263

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 06626 02 OF 04 200400Z
ACTION EUR-01

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-01
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P 200340Z MAR 00
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INFO MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 04 MOSCOW 006626

HELSINKI PLEASE PASS TO ST. PETERSBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/17/10

TAGS: PGOV, PINR, RS

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS -- ONE WEEK
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ABLE TO ASSUAGE THE PROTEST AND SKILLFULLY DIFFUSE THE
ISSUE WITH OTHER GROUPS.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 06626 02 OF 04 200400Z

6. (C) SIZING UP THE OTHER CANDIDATES, [REDACTED] SAID
THAT ZYUGANOV WOULD RECEIVE LESS SUPPORT THAN HE DID
IN 1996, BOTH FOR DEMOGRAPHIC REASONS AND FOR THE KPRF
FACTION'S LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE IN THE DUMA. ECHOING
WHAT WE HAVE HEARD FROM OTHER QUARTERS, [REDACTED]
OFFERED THAT ZYUGANOV'S POSITION IN THE PARTY MAY BE
ON THE LINE. HE WAS QUITE COMPLIMENTARY, HOWEVER, OF
KEMEROVO GOVERNOR TULEYEV. [REDACTED] SAID TULEYEV, A
FORMER MINISTER, IS WORTHY TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT AND
GIVEN HIS WORK DIFFUSING THE PROTESTS OF MINERS IN HIS
REGION AND OTHER DISGRUNTLED GROUPS, COULD REPLACE
MATVIYENKO AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. [REDACTED]
GENERALLY WAS DISMISSIVE OF YAVLINSKIY. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TOLD US THAT THE KREMLIN GOAL IS TO KEEP
YAVLINSKIY'S SUPPORT AS LOW AS POSSIBLE -- TWO PERCENT
IF POSSIBLE, BUT DEFINITELY LOWER THAN THE 6 PERCENT
"YABLOKO" RECEIVED IN THE DUMA ELECTION.

SPS/"OTECHESTVO" ENDORSE PUTIN

7. (C) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] RECENTLY PREDICTED TO US THAT
RELATIONS BETWEEN MOSCOW AND THE KREMLIN WOULD RETURN
TO NORMAL AFTER THE ELECTION. ON MARCH 13, MAYOR
LUZHKOVA AND "OTECHESTVO" TOOK A STEP THAT WOULD HELP
MAKE THAT HAPPEN BY FORMALLY ENDORSING PUTIN'S
CANDIDACY. "SOYUZ PRAVYKH SIL" (SPS) AND THE SPS DUMA

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PAGE 03 MOSCOW 06626 02 OF 04 200400Z
FACTION ON MARCH 14 MADE A SIMILAR DECISION, BUT IT
WAS MORE DIVISIVE. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] SAID THAT HALF OF THE 10 PARTIES
THAT MAKE UP SPS VOTED TO BACK PUTIN AND HALF, THE
SMALLER OLD-LINE LIBERAL PARTIES, OPPOSED.

[REDACTED] SAID SPS LEADERS ARE TORN ON THE ISSUE
AND IT COULD LEAD TO A SPLIT IN THE BLOC. KIRIYENKO
SUPPORTS PUTIN BECAUSE HE HOPES TO BECOME A MINISTER
AFTER THE ELECTION. NEMTSOV AND KHAKAMADA ABSTAINED.
GAYDAR REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE VOTE AT ALL.

[REDACTED] CLAIMED THAT THE DUMA FACTION IS COMPOSED
OF "KIRIYENKO PEOPLE" AND THAT IS WHY THEY BACKED THE
DECISION ON PUTIN.

8. (C) [REDACTED] SAID SOME OF THE DISSIDENT SPS
LEADERS SUCH AS DUMA DEPUTY SERGEY KOVALEV ALREADY ARE
SUPPORTING YAVLINSKIY. HE ADDED THAT MOST OF THE
WRITERS AND ACTORS ON THE "KUKLY" TELEVISION PROGRAM
ALSO BACK YAVLINSKIY. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
INTENDS TO VOTE FOR THE "YABLOKO" LEADER ON THE FIRST
ROUND.

ALL MOSTLY QUIET ON THE MEDIA FRONT

9. (U) IN CONTRAST TO THE DUMA CAMPAIGN, THERE ARE
FEW MEDIA MACHINATIONS IN RELATIONS TO THE
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. OBSERVERS ARGUE THAT THERE IS
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PAGE 04 MOSCOW 06626 02 OF 04 200400Z
"NO NEED" FOR IT SINCE PUTIN SURELY WILL WIN. THE
KREMLIN-LINKED MEDIA APPEAR TO BE MORE EVEN-HANDED
WITH COVERAGE SINCE OTHER CANDIDATES DO NOT POSE A
THREAT. IN PRACTICE, HOWEVER, PUTIN GARNERS THE
MAJORITY OF AIRTIME AS HIS OFFICIAL DUTIES ARE
COVERED, AND HE HAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS TO
STATE-RUN TELEVISION WHICH IS THE MAIN FORM OF NEWS
FOR MOST RUSSIANS. INDEED, ON MARCH 24, STATE-
CONTROLLED RTR WILL SHOW A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE
"UNKNOWN PUTIN" FEATURING INTERVIEWS WITH FRIENDS,
FAMILY, AND FORMER COLLEAGUES.

10. (U) ONE EXCEPTION TO THIS QUIET SITUATION IS AN
UNUSUAL STATEMENT RELEASED BY THE PUTIN CAMPAIGN

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HEADQUARTERS ON MARCH 4. THE STAFF WAS DISPLEASED WITH "SEGODNYA" NEWSPAPER FOR ITS CRITICISM OF PUTIN'S CAMPAIGNING, SUGGESTING HE BROKE ELECTION LAWS BY ISSUING PRESS RELEASES BEFORE THE PERMITTED START OF CAMPAIGNING. IT ALSO ALLEGES HE IS USING HIS INCUMBENCY TO PUSH AHEAD OF OTHER CANDIDATES. (NOTE: "SEGODNYA" IS OWNED BY GUSINSKIY -- A KREMLIN RIVAL WHOSE NTV IS THE MOST CRITICAL OF CHECHNYA AND PUTIN. END NOTE) THE STATEMENT FROM PUTIN'S STAFF STATED "THE ELECTION HEADQUARTERS PRESS SERVICE WILL CONTINUE TO CAREFULLY MONITOR ALL INSTANCES OF LIES IN RESPECT TO [PUTIN] AND RESERVES THE RIGHT TO USE EVERY MEANS

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PTQ3264

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 06626 03 OF 04 200400Z
ACTION EUR-01

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-01
	DINT-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	DOTE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 04 MOSCOW 006626

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AT ITS DISPOSAL FOR...AN 'ASYMMETRIC' RESPONSE TO THE
PROVOCATIONS."

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 06626 03 OF 04 200400Z

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10. (U) "SEGODNYA" EDITOR MIKHAIL BERGER SAID ON MARCH 6 THAT THE STATEMENT SOUNDED "LIKE THREATS FROM BANDITS." "SEGODNYA'S" MARCH 7 ARTICLE ON THE STATEMENT ASKED, "WILL THE TAX POLICE TURN UP AT THE EDITORIAL OFFICES OF NEWSPAPERS WHOM THE HEADQUARTERS SUSPECT OF 'ROCKING THE BOAT'? HOW ELSE ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THE THREAT OF USING 'ASYMMETRY' FROM A STRUCTURE THAT EFFECTIVELY HAS UNLIMITED

ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES?" ALTHOUGH [REDACTED] TOLD US THAT JOURNALISTS ARE CONCERNED BY THE "ASYMMETRICAL RESPONSE" MEMO, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF THIS TYPE OF PRESSURE DOES NOT REALLY SCARE JOURNALISTS. [REDACTED] THINKS OTHER KINDS OF PRESSURE THE ADMINISTRATION CAN BRING TO BEAR MAY SHIFT COVERAGE AND THAT LACK OF FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE ADVERSELY AFFECTS FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

12. (U) WHAT EXACTLY CONSTITUTES "CAMPAIGNING HAS CAUSED MUCH CONFUSION AMONG JOURNALISTS. AT A RECENT SEMINAR ON THE MEDIA AND THE ELECTIONS WHICH POLOFF ATTENDED, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] REFUSED TO ENGAGE IN ANY SPECIFICS ABOUT THE LAW AND REFERRED REPEATEDLY TO THE ELECTION CODE, ADVISING JOURNALISTS TO READ IT. PARTICIPANTS REGISTERED THEIR DISMAY WITH THIS ANSWER AND THE CONFUSION WITH THE LAW.

13. (C) [REDACTED] COMMENTED ON THE VARIOUS ACTIONS BY THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION AND THE MEDIA MINISTRY AND NOTED THAT THE TWO ORGANS DO NOT GET ALONG WELL,
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PAGE 03 MOSCOW 06626 03 OF 04 200400Z
BECAUSE THE MEDIA MINISTRY BELIEVES IT SHOULD BE THE ONLY ONE ALLOWED TO INTERVENE IN THE MEDIA. AS FOR THE LACK OF "BLACK PR" OR BIASED MEDIA IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, [REDACTED] ECHOED COMMENTS BY OTHER ANALYSTS WHO POINT OUT THAT THIS INDICATES MORE A CHANGE DUE TO A SUDDEN EXPLOSION OF MEDIA ETHICS, THAN A REFLECTION OF THE INEVITABILITY OF THE OUTCOME OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. HE ADDED THAT WHILE ONE CANNOT USE THESE METHODS CONSTANTLY OR THEY STOP BEING EFFECTIVE, SUCH METHODS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE USED AGAIN IF NEEDED. [REDACTED] THINKS THAT PUTIN IS TOO PRAGMATIC TO PUT EXCESSIVE DIRECT PRESSURE ON THE MEDIA AFTER THE ELECTION, ADDING THAT PUTIN NEEDS FOR THE MEDIA TO BE SEEN AS FREE AND HE NEEDS TO AVOID IRRITATING THE WEST.

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ELECTION MONITORS

14. (C) AS DURING THE DUMA ELECTIONS, RUSSIAN PARTY POLL WATCHERS AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS PLAN TO OBSERVE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. THE KPRF, PER USUAL, PLANS TO HAVE POLL WATCHERS AT ALL 93,000 PRECINCTS IN RUSSIA. OTHER CANDIDATE REPRESENTATIVES ALSO WILL BE PRESENT. THE U.S. EMBASSY AND CONSULATES WILL FIELD 60 OBSERVERS IN 19 SUBJECTS OF THE FEDERATION. THE OSCE WILL HAVE 300 SHORT-TERM OBSERVERS, DOWN FROM THE 440 DURING THE DUMA ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH MOST INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION MISSIONS WILL BE SMALLER THAN IN DECEMBER, MANY PLAN

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PAGE 04 MOSCOW 06626 03 OF 04 200400Z
TO FOLLOW BALLOT PROTOCOLS FROM PRECINCTS TO THE TERRITORIAL ELECTION COMMISSIONS WHERE THE PROTOCOLS ARE ENTERED INTO THE COMPUTER. ALLEGATIONS OF FRAUD LAST TIME CHARGED THAT THIS WAS THE POINT WHERE RESULTS SUPPOSEDLY WERE TAMPERED WITH.

COMMENT

15. (C) DESPITE THE DEBATABLE DROP IN SUPPORT FOR PUTIN, IT IS UNLIKELY THE ELECTION WILL GO A SECOND ROUND. THOUGH IT MAY NOT BE A TREND, IT DOES SUGGEST, HOWEVER, THAT HAD THE ELECTION BEEN HELD IN JUNE, IT IS POSSIBLE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE OF A HORSE RACE. GOVERNING IS NOT EASY AND IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME. [REDACTED] ADMITTED THAT NEITHER PUTIN NOR ZYUGANOV COULD SOLVE THE WAGE AND PENSION PROBLEMS IN THE NEAR TERM. A MANDATE MAY BE NECESSARY FOR PUTIN TO BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT HIS PROGRAM, WHATEVER THAT MAY BE. REGARDLESS OF A MANDATE, AFTER A FEW MORE MONTHS OF WRANGLING WITH RUSSIA'S MANY PROBLEMS, HIS APPROVAL RATING IS LIKELY TO SLIP FURTHER AS VOTERS BECOME MORE ACCUSTOMED TO SEEING PUTIN AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL PTQ3265

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 06626 04 OF 04 200400Z

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 06626 04 OF 04 200400Z

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