

# Conflict Studies Research Centre

## PRIMAKOV APPOINTMENT: CRISIS DEFERRED

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### Primakov Appointment: Crisis Deferred

The Duma's appointment of Yevgenny Primakov as prime minister on 11 September has resolved for the time being the political crisis that had been brewing in Russia since President Yel'tsin dismissed Sergey Kiriyenko as prime minister on 23 August. Yel'tsin's decision not to put forward Viktor Chernomyrdin for a third time as prime minister indicates how the balance of power has shifted away from the president towards the Duma. Had the Duma rejected Chernomyrdin a third time, Yel'tsin would have been obliged under the constitution to dissolve the Duma and call for fresh Duma elections. The CPRF faction in the Duma, however, was threatening to begin impeachment proceedings against Yel'tsin were he to nominate Chernomyrdin a third time. Once impeachment proceedings are initiated, the Duma cannot be dissolved. Yel'tsin clearly did not feel confident enough to risk confronting the Duma. Neither does he feel confident enough to bypass the constitution and establish direct presidential rule. This is because he cannot be certain that the power structures will support him.

Yel'tsin is likely to remain very much a weakened figure until his presidency ends. Although the formal powers he enjoys under the constitution remain unaltered, he is unlikely to risk antagonising the Communist faction in the Duma, who will launch impeachment procedures if they perceive that the president poses a threat to their existence. It is possible that some formal agreement may be reached that will enhance the power of the Duma vis-à-vis the president. Although the Constitutional Court is due to rule in the autumn on whether Yel'tsin can run again for president in 2000, it is less likely that he will be willing to run. The oligarchs who have controlled the Russian economy since 1991 will now be looking for another champion, and the Communist faction in the Duma is unlikely to accept any attempt by Yel'tsin to remain in office after 2000; it will seek to impeach him if he does do so.

The foreign minister Yevgenny Primakov was chosen as a compromise candidate for Prime Minister, as he was acceptable to both the president and most of the Duma factions, above all the CPRF. He is widely respected in Russia as foreign minister, and his appointment to that post in January 1996 was supported by the Communist leader, Gennady Zyuganov, at that time. Any stability his appointment brings is likely to be only short term. Primakov himself has no experience in dealing with economic issues. His cabinet is likely to pursue a more dirigiste and etatist approach. The government has been ordered to print more money to pay off wage arrears. Viktor Gerashchenko has been appointed as chairman of the Central Bank; he pursued such a policy when he was chairman of the USSR State Bank and Russian State Bank in the early 1990s. These policies could do serious damage to the Russian economy, and could therefore in the long term undermine rather than strengthen political stability in the Russian Federation.

Many of the economic measures currently being advocated are unlikely to succeed, and the printing of money will simply cause hyperinflation. This is likely to further increase instability in society, and could lead to mass unrest. Industrial unrest increased in 1998, with striking miners blocking railway lines, and this trend could develop. This in turn makes it more likely that the state will resort to repressive measures in order to try to control the situation. If the oligarchies resist attempts

to control them, then this could lead to some form of civil war, accompanied by various coup attempts, as they struggle for control of the power ministries and their forces.

The financial and political crisis of August-September 1998 has intensified centrifugal trends within the Russian Federation. Kaliningrad declared a state of emergency in early September, and Aleksandr Lebed introduced emergency economic measures in Krasnoyarsk kray, even though he admitted that this violated Russian law. The Kemerovo governor Aman Tuleyev has called upon local executives to ignore Moscow and the Tatarstan leadership has stated that it will withhold payment of some funds to the federal budget. Viktor Kress, governor of Tomsk region has stated that Tomsk has stopped paying federal taxes. If the economic situation worsens, then regional leaderships are more likely to ignore the centre and seek local solutions for their problems. Rationing has been introduced in some areas, and the shortage of basic necessities has been reported. Bread shortages have been reported in the Kaluga region, as have shortages of basic medicines in the Altay region. If the centre fails to improve the economic situation, then these centrifugal tendencies are likely to increase, and the federal authorities appear to have few, if any, means of reversing this process. Any attempt by the centre to use force to counteract centrifugalism is likely to fail and will simply to exacerbate the problem.

This year's harvest will prove disappointing. Drought has damaged crops. On 12 August, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food stated that the grain harvest was expected to be 65 million tonnes, compared with 88.5 million tonnes in 1997. Prognoses made in September are even worse, and some forecasts estimate that the harvest could be under 60 million tonnes. It will be necessary to rely on reserves, although there are again different estimates of how large Russia's grain reserve is. If food shortages emerge this winter, then this will constitute a further threat to Russia's stability.

If Yel'tsin does step down in 2000, or leaves the presidency before then, under the constitution, the prime minister becomes acting president and elections are then held within three months. Yevgeny Primakov is unlikely to run for president. If economic and social conditions are grim, then Yel'tsin's departure could spark off instability and civil conflict that means that the succession question could only be resolved by force. However, assuming that Russia retains a modicum of stability, then the main contenders for the presidency are likely to be:

Aleksandr Lebed', governor of Krasnoyarsk kray;

Viktor Chernomyrdin, former prime minister;

Gennady Zyuganov, or whoever leads the CPRF;

Yury Luzhkov, mayor of Moscow.

Other important contenders could be:

Grigory Yavlinskiy, leader of Yabloko;

Andrey Nikolayev, former head of the Federal Border Guards, and currently Duma deputy;

Yegor Stroyev, chairman of the Federation Council;

Gennady Seleznev, chairman of the Duma;

Dmitry Ayatskov, governor of Saratov region;

Gennady Titov, governor of Samara region.

There is currently much discussion that Luzhkov may form an electoral alliance with the CPRF and other leftist forces. Zyuganov has spoken of the desirability of a dialogue with Luzhkov; Nikolayev

has given an extremely favourable assessment of Luzhkov and advocated that he lead a centre-left coalition for the next presidential election. The strongest front runners for the next presidential election currently appear to be Luzhkov and Lebed'.