

## ***Triologue Club Business Breakfast***

**Topic: The St. Petersburg Summit: Preliminary Results of Russia's Presidency in the G8**

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*Vyacheslav Nikonov, the Head of the Commission on International Cooperation and Public Diplomacy of the Russian Federation Public Chamber:*

One of the most difficult jobs is to provide comments on the G8 meetings. The reason for this is the amorphous structure of the G8, the nature of the results from its work is not obvious, and the G8 processes are not evident for external observers.

What has Russia expected from the G8 Summit? Simply speaking Russian expectations were to host this summit and to be a good chair of the G8 Summit.

The concerns in press, public opinion were much more numerous than ones in the Kremlin. In the Kremlin the G8 Summit was regarded as one event in a series of other large events of symbolic nature such as the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of St. Petersburg or the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victory in World War II. Among those who were concerned about the meeting, along with the journalists, were the event organizers in St. Petersburg. As for the President himself and his foreign policy team, they were quite relaxed.

Certain problems were expected from Russian-American meeting and from a free day, which President George W. Bush could spend in Russia.

Many words were said that the speech by [the US Vice-President] Dick Cheney marked the lowest point in the relations between the US and Russia in recent years. This was true. Through those six months which preceded the speech by Dick Cheney President Bush and President Putin had only a couple of telephone conversations, which definitely reflected the lowest point of their communication and relations. Now there is a feeling that in Vilnius the relations between Russia and the USA reached the bottom but are gradually rising to the surface. We can only see in the future how long this tendency will be. Onwards there are serious proofs primarily concerned with Russia-Georgian relations, the recognition of Kosovo independence, which is understood by Russia as a precedent, and also with resolutions that will be taken on NATO summit in Riga.

As for Russia's WTO accession and the refusal of the United States to provide its approvals, it was definitely understood by everyone as a failure and disappointment. The problem is not that Russia intends to gain WTO membership at any cost. As President Putin said, "the benefits of Russia's WTO accession have not been yet proved."

On the one hand, there is an important symbolic meaning. On the other hand the dragging out of Russia's accession to the WTO can become in result indefinitely long. As we can observe the other countries, which have already reached agreement with Russia, will be able to begin a new round of negotiations on Russian membership in WTO. Georgia has already done this and we cannot exclude the possibility that other countries can decide to do the same. At the same time we have to admit attention that American companies are interested to gain access to Russian markets as well as Russian companies to American markets. If the agreement on the WTO can be reached, the American companies such as *Chevron*, *Conoco Philips* could have good chances to participate in the exploration in the Shtockman oil and gas fields. However without the WTO their participation will be very problematic.

As for the matter of democracy in Russia the discussion of this issue in Russian-American frameworks and the G8 frameworks results without any pains for Kremlin at all. Speaking about the participation of the undersecretary of the US in the meeting of a Nazi, communist and liberal group, with rating of less than one percent can only be regarded as the farce. The curious were the attempts of my colleagues in Public Chamber to express their protests to President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair of participation of those officials in the meetings. And such a move as a recommendation to create in Russia such democracy as in Iraq is one wished to any opponent because it is very difficult to respond to it in a bad manner.

As for G8 itself, the meeting was definitely overshadowed by the Middle East and the war in Lebanon. Certain experts and politicians said that it was a positive thing because in such circumstances Kasparov or Kasyanov had less time for their presentation in *BBC*, *Skynews* or somewhere else on broadcasting channels. However those tragic events in the Middle East on the other hand also kept Russia from formulation to the full extent of proper ideas on the G8 Summit.

The events in the Middle East clearly sped up the decision-making process during the G8 Summit. Less time for coordinating was provided. The documents, which had been prepared in advance, were adopted practically without any discussion. As for the Lebanese aspect, within two days we could observe the closing of positions of all participants. If the leaders at that moment were in their capitals, there would not be a joint position as in the case of the UN Security Council resolution on North Korea. Due to fact that the leaders were all together in one place the decision could be taken.

As far as Russian evaluation of summit results and adopted documents is concerned, it is, of course, positive. The majority of documents were prepared by Russia, and all participants adopted them. The G8 format meeting and the documents adopted not only helped Russia to improve its image but also improve the image of G8 itself. Over the recent years it had the image of a "fat cat club" which was interested only their own problems. The chosen format, which brought together such players as China, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Congo, international organizations, helped to change the image of the G8. After both Vladimir Putin and Tony Blair supported the extension of the G8, the extension of G8 is now the question of time.

Surely Russia is supporting the document, which was adopted on energy security since it is representing the Russian understanding of the notion of "energy security". The document takes into consideration not only the consumer rights who are

interested in liberalization of markets and increase of production, it also represents the interests of producers who are interested in long term regulations with the consumers, fair prices as well as free transportation of the resources to the markets.

It is also important that final documents on education and the fight against epidemic diseases reflects the interests of not only the G8 members but also the interests of those countries who do not belong to the club.

Is Russia satisfied with results? The answer is “yes”, especially as far as organization is concerned. So far as the most of the organizers headed by Mr. Shuvalov are so happy that they decided to go directly from St. Petersburg to Sochi, to have their holidays in order to avoid any questions or any situation in the Kremlin. Another part of the foreign policy team headed by Mr. Prikhodko is actively preparing for the informal CIS summit, which can cause much more questions, acute topics and discussion than those of the G8 Summit and which can influence the relations between Russia and the West.