The LDPR Is Here for the Long Run
Interview with Vyacheslav Kiselev

Demokratizatsiya: How do you see the future of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia [LDPR]? Is there any program of party development?

Kiselev: Yes, of course. The LDPR is a parliamentary-like party that has a very powerful position in the political life of our country. It is an all-Russia party, second after the Communist Party. In each of the eighty-nine subjects of federation, we have our regional party organizations. But our party development is still continuing, slowly but surely. There is an organizational department in the central structure of the LDPR that is looking after staff, money, and so forth. Our goal for the near future is to make the LDPR the most active party, and for this we need to find the right people who can do the necessary work. But it’s not easy to find that kind of people in Russia.

Demokratizatsiya: What does it mean to make your party the most active?

Kiselev: There are people who were born politicians. We are searching precisely for this kind of people, who can lead our structures in the regions and guarantee their active work. That is a big task that will take many years, but already now we can say that all of our organizations are functioning successfully. We are taking part in absolutely all of the elections at any level.

For example, I am the head of the organization for the Moscow region. We are actively preparing ourselves for the election for the Moscow oblast duma, which will be this fall. Same thing in each region. We have an active, working party. The goal of this party is to struggle for power, obtaining power through legal means. We want not only legislative but executive power that will permit us to carry out our program.

As I already said, we are the second party after the Communist Party. We have almost 500,000 members. As you know, we have formal membership. It’s a very big party by European standards. We have a goal for the near future to increase our party membership by one million so that we can easily win the next election. If we manage to have one million members, I believe we can win any elections.

We already have the first serious results. Our candidate became the governor of Pskov. It’s our first bird. Besides him, several thousands of our members were

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They are heads of administrations and their deputies. Sometimes we come within a few hundred votes of victory. But at a minimum, the second place is always ours. For instance, our candidate got second place in the presidential election in the Marii-El republic. The winner was supported by the Communists. In the election in Bryansk, our candidate got second place. We know he will win the next time.

We don’t have any other enemies besides the Communists. We are not afraid of little parties or little political loiterers like Yabloko, which has structures only inside Moscow’s Garden Road. Of course we have another enemy from the other side—the Party of Power. But I think this one is not even a party, just a team of power that depends only on Yeltsin. As soon as he loses the election nothing will be left. They will fall apart if the artificial financial and political supports dry up. This is why, if we manage to get the presidency, we will have no competitors besides the Communist Party.

Demokratizatsiya: Is the LDPR party opposing the current government and president? Are you a member of the opposition bloc?

Kiselev: Yes, we are an opposition party; not an opposition only toward the current government, but also the opposition against the entire course of reforms. We are cooperating with Chernomyrdin’s government, but this does not mean that we are sharing or supporting its course. We sharply criticize this government, but sometimes we have to have mutual understanding. Then we support those proposals; we move toward them; we support the legislative bills that they submit for approval to the Duma. So we are not in hard opposition, as the Communists are—who don’t even recognize the government and block each and every one of its actions. We are a constructive opposition. We don’t block the government, and we don’t have as a goal to destroy the government at any price.

Demokratizatsiya: What are your main differences with the Chernomyrdin government?

Kiselev: The main differences are their monetarist course and shock therapy.

Demokratizatsiya: What is dividing you and the government in foreign policy?

Kiselev: First of all, I would like to say proudly that, only because of us, Russian foreign policy has changed. Only we demanded that Andrei Kozyrev leave. Now we support the activity of the Foreign Ministry of Yevgeny Primakov; we think that he is hard enough in defending Russian interests. He is one of the few ministers in government with whom LDPR sympathizes.

Demokratizatsiya: Even in the questions of opposing NATO’s expansion to the east?

Kiselev: Even in these questions. The LDPR has a very pure anti-NATO position, but we think that in the situation Primakov did everything possible to defend our country’s interests. Generally speaking, we are very much against NATO, and we did everything possible to prevent its expansion.
**Demokratizatsiya:** If your party manages to get the presidency of Russia, what will be your policy toward NATO?

**Kiselev:** We know that NATO is a bloc that was shaped with one goal: to oppose Russia. So we will never fall in love with NATO. But we are realists, and the foreign policy of the LDPR president will be dictated by the real situation. Nobody from our ranks will start a new cold war, an arms race, or a policy of hard mutual opposition. Zhirinovsky has made his thinking in foreign policy well known. I think we will never be grotesquely anti-NATO, but our position will spring from the understanding that that bloc is against us.

**Demokratizatsiya:** It is three years until the end of Yeltsin’s term. What will be next? What are the best and worst plausible scenarios of Russian evolution?

**Kiselev:** You know, nothing can be worse than now. There is no way to be worse. I can exclude absolutely that the LDPR will use force. I don’t know about the Communist Party—they are always preparing civic disturbances. I don’t know if we will take part in them, but at least I can tell that the LDPR will never support any forcible methods.

On the president’s team, I think that they will never use force either, because they are too close to Europe and the West, who are paying too strong attention to defend democratic values. Think—because of this, we destroyed our economy and made millions of people very poor. The democratic electoral process is our only positive achievement in the last few years. And if Yeltsin tries to destroy this by his decrees, I think that the West will press Yeltsin very strongly. And second, I think that there are political forces that Russia already has that will prevent Yeltsin from doing this. That means that we have only one option—new elections.

It will be a very legitimate change of power. All of the other scenarios have been analyzed by everybody, and all of the politicians have come to the conclusion that those will lead nowhere. Nobody will be able to keep power for long if they get it in an illegal way. So, the course will change due to one thing—Who will win the election? But I don’t think that there will be sharp changes, because the democratic processes are already deep enough. Of course, there will be some differences, but no sharp changes, no matter who comes to power.

There are three real forces that can get power. One is the representatives from the nomenklatura, the ruling block, for example, Luzhkov or Chernomyrdin. The second force can be Zyuganov or another Communist candidate. And third, Zhirinovsky or another representative from the LDPR. The course will be corrected depending on who wins the election. But the main thing that will change is that the course will be stronger to defend our national interests, more decisive to resolve our internal problems, particularly with corruption and organized crime. There can be changes in economic policy, because we definitely have to stop what is going on now with capital flight, privatization, monopoly of alcohol, tax breaks to different enterprises, and so forth. But the current team cannot solve this problem—they cannot even try. They decide everything according to their own private benefit. But it seems to me that it’s better to destroy the monopoly on alcohol and thereby bring money to the budget, than to destroy tax breaks for
pensioners and handicapped people, as our government is going to do. If we come to power, this question will be solved differently.

Speaking about General Alexander Lebed, maybe this general is very popular in the West, but I think that he is very unpopular in Russia.

**Demokratizatsiya:** You used to have very strong support in the armed forces, in law enforcement bodies, and among the young.

**Kiselev:** We will keep our position there. We understand very well that the army, the *militsiya*, and the security agencies are the structures on which the government is relying.

**Demokratizatsiya:** Why do you think that your leader, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and the LDPR itself are the most unpopular subjects of Russian political life and in the West?

**Kiselev:** I think that our party is unpopular because the Russian mass media is making a very negative image of it and the Western mass media is only using this image. Nobody in the West knows the real Vladimir Volfovich Zhirinovsky. And they use whatever is produced in Russia by his enemies. If Western journalists would bother to know the reality of Russian political life, the attitude toward us would be absolutely different. The Russian mass media is simply blocking out the LDPR and Zhirinovsky himself. If he is speaking in a Duma session, then Russian television will show the most unappealing part of the speech, or will provide their own comment, which will change the meaning of the speech. Zhirinovsky is always in montage, never live. The Russian media does not like us, and we don’t like them. This is the fifth column of Russia, and it’s working on Yeltsin’s team. We are not hiding our attitude toward them; we are against the TV, which represents only one side. We can be on the TV only for money; nobody invites us. We are completely blocked by the media. There are very few cases when the media wants to conduct an interview with Zhirinovsky, and then it is to get some information. Even when Zhirinovsky is traveling in the regions, we are just blocked. For example, recently we were in St. Petersburg, where the local TV planned to broadcast a one-hour conversation with Zhirinovsky but the head of the local TV was threatened with dismissal if he didn’t cancel the interview, so of course, he canceled it.

**Demokratizatsiya:** How do you see the main goals and problems of the LDPR fraction in the current Duma?

**Kiselev:** I am already in my second term in the State Duma and can compare the attitude toward us in the previous Duma and the present one. Then, they believed that we came to power by chance, that we did not have an electorate, and that the voters were just trying to irk the presidential team. They thought we were a transitory thing. After the 1995 elections, when the LDPR obtained the second-largest bloc in the Duma, the relation toward us sharply changed. They began to treat us more seriously, to see that we do have a steady constituency, and that in the next Duma we will have an even bigger faction. That is why the gov-
The government, as well as other parties, is attempting to build good relations with us. They understand that without us, no serious issue can be resolved. All understand that the LDPR is a political force that is here for the long run.

In comparison to the previous Duma, the quality of our deputies grew strongly. Today we have, besides the deputy chairman of parliament, four Duma committee chairmen, and very important ones: of the Media; Industry, Construction, Transport and Energy; of Geopolitical Matters, and of Labor and Social Support. Most importantly, LDPR members serve as deputy chairmen in each of the Duma committees.

I am deputy chairman of the Committee on Legislation, Courts and Legal Reform, and I head the section on criminal and criminal-procedural law. I can boast that I, not only in the Duma but among all the parliaments of the world, am the only one that within a year and a half managed to get two codes adopted. Last year I finished the Criminal Code, and right now I am aiming for the Duma to adopt, in its third reading at the end of the year, the Criminal-Procedural Code. I have to render account to my faction, to my party, and to the electorate. That was a lot of work, if you consider that I am only one of the members of our committee that worked on that.

Demokratizatsiya: How do you stand on the death penalty?
Kiselev: Social opinion is such that it would be practically impossible to annul the death penalty completely.

Look, we’ve done practically everything that was requested of us by the human rights organizations. But the situation with crime has not changed. That means that the reason is not with the law, nor with the legislative power, but with the executive power. The idea that predominates public opinion is that the situation will get worse if the death penalty is banned. Don’t forget that our country is not only Christian, but Muslim as well. In Islamic tradition, the death penalty has always existed. That is how it will be in the near term; the actual application of the death penalty will still be weak, but its full cancellation will not happen.

Demokratizatsiya: Are you content, as its author, a lawyer, and a legislator, with the way your code works in real life?
Kiselev: No, I am not. It is necessary to see how it will work out in a year, and later we will draft all the necessary amendments and build up its weak spots. In a year, we intend to introduce a block of amendments to the Duma.

But if we are to speak about the law enforcement and court systems on the whole, the greatest misfortune is that they don’t have enough money. I don’t think that the Russians are particularly disrespectful of the law. The law is not respected by the authorities. But where the average citizen is concerned, there is enough respect for the law. The main task in the reform of the courts is to make them
more accessible to the average citizen, so that he can uphold his rights there. We, for example, considered establishing a system of justices of the peace. But to introduce this we need much more money, which today we don't have. And we also need time, as well as an increase in economic and industrial output. There are people who are ready to invest in the Russian economy, but nobody is giving us any money to reform the court system. We need to teach them how to fend for themselves.