

# Deepening Russia's Democracy: The St. Petersburg Summit Contribution

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The St. Petersburg G8 Summit is helping deepen democracy in its host, Russia, in several ways both in the preparatory lead-up to and during the summit itself (Kirton 2006).

## **A. Before the Summit**

### *1. Crossing the Iron Curtain of Ignorance*

In its coverage of Russia's January 1, 2006, cut-off of gas to Ukraine, which would not pay for it, and Ukraine's subsequent cut-off of Russian gas to Europe, the western media overwhelmingly blamed Russia. In return, Russians responded with bewilderment and anger at this harsh reaction to their effort to follow the market principles long preached by the West. The combination was a stunning display of the strength of the iron curtain of ignorance, inherited Cold War imagery and mistrust between Russia and those outside, as the months unfolded and Russia's presidency of the G8 took shape. It forced those on both sides of the old iron curtain to take a closer look at the other and to learn more about the other's faults and achievements, about the wide and deep range of interdependence and shared vulnerabilities, and about how best to induce the other to pull together for the common cause. Due to the dense summit preparatory and follow-up process, the novelty of Russia hosting the summit and the thousands of contacts among ministers, officials, experts, parliamentarians, legislators, youth and others, a dynamic process of direct and deeper learning has been unleashed. Many Russians are thus directly discovering what western democracy, with all its flaws, is really like, and that they like it, suitably adopted and improved, for themselves at home.

### *2. Fostering Nongovernmental Networks*

Through Civil G8, the Russian presidency's innovative process for engaging global and Russian civil society in the summit, many hundreds of Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have met their global counterparts for the first time. Through their shared cause of trying to shape the agenda, emphasis and outcomes of the St. Petersburg Summit, they have discovered the realities of one another's countries, shared best practices and techniques, and formed mutual support relationships that will extend to other events, endure, and expand long after the summit's end. The rapidly emerging civil society movement in Russia has received vital international reinforcement at a critical stage.

### *3. Deepening Domestic Understanding of Markets and Transparency*

Russia's skilled summit leaders, who have lived and worked in the West had an understanding of open democracy and markets that many of their colleagues in the domestic departments of the Russian government often lacked. The unusually vibrant process of G8 ministerial meetings to prepare the summit—featuring unusual gatherings of those for energy, health and education—brought knowledge of how the established democracies did things to those in the domestic departments with great force. Thus Russia's initial G8 proposal on energy security contained little recognition of the contribution that free market mechanisms could make. However, by mid-

March, the G8 energy ministers “Chair’s Statement” drafted by its Russian host, proclaimed that “meeting energy security challenges will require reliance on market-based pricing...” The summit itself will declare that the democratic, market principles of “transparency” come first.

#### ***4. Environmentalism***

Russia’s initial approach to energy security had only a small role for environmental protection and conservation. As early as February the Civil 8 process injected a strong emphasis on environmentalism into the energy security file. Reinforced by such pressure, and the G8-generated global attention to Russia’s approach to energy security, President Putin soon after made an historic, if expensive, decision to re-route a new pipeline to protect the ecological integrity of Lake Baikal as the largest body of freshwater in the world. The St. Petersburg summit’s document on energy security, with its emphasis on transparency, efficiency and conservation, renewables and climate change control will reflect the values of environmental democracy to a considerable degree.

#### ***5. Putin’s Public Promises***

At the Civil 8 gathering in Moscow on July 3-4, President Putin as the summit host met, for the first time in G8 history, with over 650 leaders of civil society organizations from around the world. In a fully public session, transmitted to the entire global community through the free media covering the event, he openly heard and responded frankly to the consensus advice of civil society on issues all across the summit’s agenda, and beyond it as well. There he made seventeen public pledges to civil society that he would take new, specific actions at and outside the summit, in response to civil society advice (see Appendix A). In particular, he promised that should the recently approved NGO bill regulating the activities of civil society bodies in Russia prove more restrictive than its predecessors, he would amend it to remove its restrictive effect.

#### ***6. Russia’s WTO Accession***

The action forcing deadline and the need for trade-offs brought by the approaching summit led to United States to more substantially toward agreeing, subject to congressional approval, on the eve of the St. Petersburg Summit that Russia would formally be admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The prospect and reality of Russia’s membership will induce it to abide by the rule of law in its domestic and international commercial relations, improve its transparency and predictability, and give it and its trade partners access to international dispute settlements through the global trade judiciary of the Appellate Body of the WTO. It will foster an even more open Russian economy, and a culture of respect for the rule of law that will radiate throughout Russian society as a whole. In contrast, failure to admit Russia, as President Putin noted earlier, would induce Russia to stop abiding by those WTO disciplines it is already voluntarily respecting.

#### ***7. Economic Opening***

In order to boost its G8 image and credentials, Russia in the immediate lead-up to St. Petersburg opened its economy in important ways. On July 1 it made the ruble convertible, allowing money to be transferred in and out of Russia. On July 15 it allowed some shares of its state-owned oil firm, Rosneft, to be sold to Russian citizens and foreigners, trade freely on the London Stock Exchange and thus be subject to international regulatory, accounting and corporate governance rules. It similarly planned to privatize, with majority foreign ownership, some of its electricity-generating firms.

## **B. At the Summit**

### ***1. Bilateral Democracy Dialogue***

The onsite bilateral meetings before and during the summit between President Putin and his individual G8 partners provide an opportunity for the latter to express in detail directly, on a private and interactive basis, their philosophy of democratic governance, their particular concerns about Russia's democratic deficit and their proposals and preferred best practices regarding what Russia should do. This process began informally over dinner on the evening of July 14 and more formally on the morning of July 15 when presidents Bush and Putin met. During their second encounter President Bush shared his philosophy of government and discussed land reform and property rights in Russia. At the subsequent news conference, President Putin described his response as follows:

“We have discussed this issue at length on the initiative of U.S. and on my own initiative as well. It is true that we assume that nobody knows better than us how we can strengthen our own nation, but we know for sure that we cannot strengthen our nation without developing democratic institutions. That is the path we will take, but certainly we will do this by ourselves.

### ***2. President Putin's Democratic Declaration***

The G8 summit's new conferences and sessions induced President Putin to declare in more detail and with greater directness his devotion to democratic principles that his listeners understood. In doing so he may well have internalized his declared norms, and at least raised the disincentives to acting in ways contrary to his personally, publicly declared and thus internationally embedded norms. At his first news conference at the end of the opening dinner on July 15, Putin indicated he intended to step down as president of Russia, in accordance with the current constitutional requirement, when his current term came to an end in 2008. Until then, he declared, he was devoting to making democracy and the market economy an irreversible reality in Russia's life.

### ***3. Democratic Energy Security as a Defining Principle***

See Appendix B.

## **C. Missed Opportunities**

### ***1. Russia's Membership in the International Energy Agency***

To come

## References

Kirton, Jon (2006), "The Road to St. Petersburg," pp. 18-22 in Maurice Fraser, ed., *G8 Summit 2006: Issues and Instruments, St. Petersburg, 15-17 July, 2006*. Agora Projects, London.

Pamfilova, Ella (2006), "The Civil G8 2006," p. 23 in Maurice Fraser, ed., *G8 Summit 2006: Issues and Instruments, St. Petersburg, 15-17 July, 2006*. Agora Projects, London.

## Appendix A: Commitments by President Putin to the Civil 8

From the unofficial English translation of President Putin's address to the participants of the Civil 8 Summit

2006-1. Many of your ideas, as I said, have been reflected in the summary documents. Particularly, the NGO proposals 'A Community for Creation of Systematic Mechanisms, Consultation and Monitoring Realisation of Summit Resolutions' are worthy of specific attention.

2006-2. I am sure that your experience, knowledge of real life, and closeness to the people; as you work directly with the people, as reflected in your recommendations, will be substantial additions to the agenda for the forthcoming G8 summit.

2006-3. I am just drawing your attention to the process of our work on this law. I concede that this document is not perfect. This I can do. But that should not stop Russian non-governmental organisations, or any public organisations, from drawing attention, particularly in the course of this legislation's application, to legal practice which will be established during its application; they may make necessary remarks, proposals, and **I assure you that we will, of course, take these remarks and proposals into account.**

2006-4. I want to assure you that everything that you expound will, in essence, reach the G8 countries' heads, and that not only will we study them attentively, but we will also analyse them most critically, and will take them into account in making ultimate decisions.

2006-5. Energy security must include environmental security, there are no disputes of problems in this regard.

2006-6. With specific regard to the G8 summit in Saint Petersburg, I want to draw your attention to the fact that **the subject under discussion in Saint Petersburg in relation to atomic energy will not be development of atomic energy worldwide, but rather issues of ensuring the security of atomic energy. This is what the subject of our talks will be.** But of course, **since there is this recommendation from you, put together by you in the area of development, we will, of course, raise this with the G8 leaders,** my colleagues, although, I should tell you now, several of my colleagues have even been reluctant to discuss this topic on principle.

2006-7. Therefore, in the end everyone agreed that we **should discuss problems of atomic energy security in Saint Petersburg.**

2006-8. Now specifically. Allocation of additional funds. You said 10 billion, and in principle this may not be a large amount for the G8 countries, and this problem could be solved. The issue is that we should fulfil all of our responsibilities and resolutions that have already been undertaken in this regard. Not all resolutions have been implemented in full, and **our position is that we must first deliver on resolutions accepted previously, and only then can we undertake new responsibilities or announce new responsibilities.** Although the question raised is absolutely the right one.

2006-9. (regarding creating a system for exchange of information and experience between non-government organisations and the professional communities of G8 countries) I must regretfully say that our work on preparation of documents for the G8 summit is too tangled with

bureaucracy, which is a heavy burden. **I doubt that we will be able to inset this into the concluding documents in time**, and I speak of this with regret, as I believe that this is an extremely important topic and an interesting and entirely realistic proposal. Therefore I promise you that, firstly, **I will definitely mention this during the free discussions on this theme, and secondly, that this will be included in the presidential closing address.** And I think that my colleagues will definitely react to your proposal. We will think about what can be done in order to realise this proposal.

2006-10. You said that you would like to see the subject of combating infectious diseases on the agenda for this and future G8 summits. The agendas for future summits will be set by the countries hosting them, and next year, this will be the Federal Republic of Germany. **I will pass on your wish, of course.** But as with education, the fight against infectious diseases is one of the subjects that always comes up on the agenda in one way or another.

2006-11. (regarding infectious diseases, HIV/AIDS and drug addiction) I want to assure you that not only will I pass on your concerns, but I am sure - and I will say this to Mrs Merkel - that the future German presidency will also give its attention to the problems you have raised. (I do not have the right to speak for Mrs Merkel, but I know how the German leadership feels about these issues.)

2006-12. (regarding development aid, continued growth and its relation to agricultural subsidies as a boundary to growth) Therefore what you are saying does not, to a great extent, apply to us, but to our colleagues. **I want them to hear this too**, because a large number of NGOs in the G8 countries would defend, say, agriculture subsidies in their countries, and this will continue to produce poverty in the developing countries. Then the G8 leaders will kindly write off these debts over and over again.

2006-13. (regarding the importance and centrality of human rights abuses) ...I give you my word that everything you have said here will be passed on to my colleagues, you can have no doubt of that. It will also be a subject of our discussions.

2006-14. [The Iranian nuclear programme] will certainly be one of the main issues, without any doubt. We very much hope that our Iranian partners will accept the proposals the six countries have made and that we will be able to open up dialogue and negotiations based on these proposals as soon as possible. We would very much like to see these talks begin before the summit in St Petersburg, but it seems this is not possible.

2006-15. Russia is committed to doing everything it can to help settle this crisis and we will work together with our European and American partners to find acceptable solutions so as to give Iran access to modern technology on the one hand, while on the other hand addressing the international community's concerns regarding proliferation of nuclear military technology and ensuring that all work in this area is, as you absolutely correctly said, under the constant control of international organisations, above all the IAEA.

2006-16. [Combating terrorism] will definitely be at the centre of our discussion.

2006-17. [regarding genetically modified products] we will insist on using the standards that the NGOs are proposing.

Notes: The unofficial English translation of President Putin's address to the participants of the Civil 8 Summit and can be located at: <http://en.civilg8.ru/documents/1987.php> (accessed July 14, 2006).

Inclusions: All occasions when Putin specifically commits himself to raise an issue with the G8, or states that Russia will take a specific action in a direction recommended by the Civil 8 are included as commitments to the Civil 8.

Exclusions: Occasions when Putin mentions that he "agrees" with the Civil 8 comments or says that the comments are "good" or "correct," but does not specifically state that he will raise the issues at the summit with his colleagues; occasions when Putin mentions that state leaders "should" or "could" do something, but does not specifically mention that he will raise the issues at the summit with his colleagues are not included as commitments to the Civil 8.