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GAIDAR STRIDES AHEAD ONCE AGAIN

Union of Right Forces council will hear Putin's policies for 2004-08

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THIS SUNDAY, THE UNION OF RIGHT FORCES WILL HOLD A COUNCIL. YEGOR GAIDAR, ONE OF THE URF CO-LEADERS, WILL DELIVER AN ADDRESS ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESULTS OF 2002. IN FACT, GAIDAR WILL ESSENTIALLY BE READING OUT PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S POLICY PROGRAM FOR 2004-08.

At a location near Moscow this coming Sunday, the Union of Right Forces (URF) party will hold a council. This measure might seem like the usual gathering of party activists, held at the end of the year by all political movements - were it not for one circumstance which seems likely to turn this meeting into a first-rate political event. Yegor Gaidar, one of the URF co-leaders, will deliver an address on the socio-economic results of 2002. The intrigue in this public performance lies in the fact that at this party council, Gaidar will essentially be reading out President Vladimir Putin's policy program for 2004-08. According to our URF sources, a few months ago the Transition Economy Institute, headed by Gaidar, received an order from the Kremlin to develop this program.

The Transition Economy Institute has already developed a program for Putin: in 1999, during the lead-up to the presidential election. The results of its efforts, in the form of a large volume, were delivered to Putin in the Kremlin by Sergei Kirienko. In fact, as the URF itself claims, the Putin administration adopted 80% of the suggestions in this comprehensive volume - which emphasized economic reforms. However, while last time the URF "imposed" its services on the head of state to some extent, this time the order to develop a program has been issued officially. Another reason for this was probably that the Transition Economy Institute, unlike many similar organizations, is known for being able to combine academic analysis with political forecasting. This is exactly what the Putin administration needs right now, in the lead-up to another presidential election. Moreover, in addition to doing pure and applied research and providing consultant services to various government bodies, the Transition Economy Institute is carrying out in-depth studies of social issues and pension reforms.

In Yegor Gaidar's address - and thus, in Vladimir Putin's policy program - the greatest emphasis is placed on social reforms. Particular attention is focused on three aspects: changing the funding system for health care, migration policy, and education reforms. It is proposed to increase health care funding by taking money from social tax revenues, and the social tax rate is to be reduced. The need to pay attention to migration policy is due to a dramatic rise in the number of illegal migrants. The Gaidar-Putin program proposes to legalize the status of migrants as much as possible, and give them individual tax file numbers so that they can pay taxes in Russia. Finally, education reforms include retaining the free general education system while attracting private sector sponsorship into this area.

Besides Gaidar himself, the following people are listed among the authors of Putin's program: Vladimir Mau, deputy director of the Transition Economy Institute; Deputy Economic Development Minister

Alexei Ulyukaev (a senior analyst with the Institute); and Yevgeny Yasin, director of the Supreme School of Economics.

However, Gaidar's speech at the party council will contain more than economic analysis. Some other URF leaders have made contributions to the program. For example, URF leader Boris Nemtsov says in his notes on the program that the oligarchic regime in Russia is only growing stronger, while Putin still hasn't managed to convert his popularity into concrete action. The notes of Irina Khakamada, also included in Gaidar's report, concern development of medium-sized and small business, and foreign policy. As for Anatoly Chubais, also a co-leader of the URF, he declined to write any notes for Gaidar. At the party council, Chubais will play the role of just another member of the audience.

(Translated by Andrei Ryabochkin)

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