

- Elections to the Russian State Duma will be held on December 4. Only seven parties are running.
- Israeli security expert about the Arab Spring and the situation in the region.
- Christofer Fjellner on reforming the EU aid for trade.
- Breakfast on December 8: What happened in the Russian elections?

“Choosing Without a Choice”

Choosing while you have no real choice is the equation that Oleg Buklemishev, and many Russians with him, is trying to figure out. In a report about the upcoming Duma elections on December 4, he describes how Vladimir Putin and his supporters have reduced the opposition parties' ability to act. Yet he believes that the election is important as the result may well be that “millions of people perceive the entire Russian leadership illegitimate.” Oleg Buklemishev would like to see a tougher international leadership vis-à-vis Putin and the Kremlin. “Unfortunately more and more in today's Russian society is reminiscent of communist Soviet Union”, said Buklemishev.

On December 4 elections will be held to the lower chamber (Duma) of the Russian Parliament. After elections in 2007 four parties are represented in the Duma: United Russia (315 seats), Communist Party (57), Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democrats (40) and Just Russia (38).

After a constitutional amendment initiated by President Medvedev in 2008 the State Duma this year for the first time will be elected for five years. To get full representation a party is required to pass the next highest voting threshold in Europe, i.e. 7%.

Opinion polls show what issues most Russians consider important: “It's the economy stupid”, explained Oleg Buklemishev at the launch of the report, adding that these concerns include such topics as inflation, poverty and unemployment.



Oleg Buklemishev came to Stockholm from Moscow to present the JHS-report.

“Hardly any of these issues are included in the public election debate”, said Oleg Buklemishev, explaining that the political leadership is steering the debate away from uncomfortable topics.

What can the opposition do when not being allowed to stand for election?

“We may [in theory] be included on the seven registered parties' lists. We can certainly organize protests rallies. And we may register and report about misconducts in terms of human rights, etc.”

The report “2011 Duma Elections: Choosing In The Absence of Choice” is written by Oleg Buklemishev and can be downloaded at www.hjalmarsonfoundation.se.



A regional women's round-table conference for the Balkans, was held in Stockholm, Sweden on November 11-13. "International cooperation and the role of women in politics" was one of the topics discussed. Further issues on the agenda were "Cross-border cooperation and anti-trafficking" and "The Balkans towards the European Union". The participants came from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia. A number of politicians from IWDU also participated, representing Australia, Nicaragua and Sweden. Seated in the first row can be seen (from left): Hristina Runceva, Macedonia, Azalia Avilés, Nicaragua, Walburga Habsburg Douglas, Sweden, Josephine Stone, Australia, and Margareta Cederfelt, Sweden.

Calendar

- 🕒 2-4 Dec in Panama City, Panama
UPLA conferences for some 30 women from a number of countries in Latin America.
- 🕒 December 9-11, Turkey
Seminar on ideology in co-operation with the Turkish think tank ALT.
- 🕒 December 20,
The Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation will launch a new home page. Please visit www.hjalmarsonfoundation.se and let us know what you think of our new "cyber home"! Email your comments to: info@hjalmarsonstiftelsen.se.

Ten New IDU Members

Ten new parties have been accepted as members of the International Democrat Union (IDU): VMRO-DPMNE (Macedonia), Christian Democratic Movement (Georgia), Maldivian Democratic Party (Maldives), Democratas (Brazil), Forum for Democratic Change (Uganda), Consenso Popular (Bolivia), Party of Democratic Action, SDA BiH (Bosnia Herzegovina), Democratic Party (Mongolia), Liberal Democratic Party (Moldova) and Proyecto Venezuela (Venezuela).

Results of the Duma Elections

Thursday, December 8 the Hjalmarson Foundation is organizing a breakfast with a group of MPs that will be traveling to Russia to monitor elections on December 4. Come and listen to their stories about what really happened. Registration for this event at info@hjalmarsonstiftelsen.se.

New Assignment

MP Margaret Cederfelt has been elected treasurer of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA). PGA is a unique association of which only national parliamentarians can be members. PGA was founded in 1978. The aim of the organisation is to peacefully solve international problems through international cooperation.



Margareta Cederfelt

PGA's main focus is on issues such as: peace and democracy, sustainable development and health, as well as international law and human rights.

In 1989 the PGA member and prime minister in Trinidad and Tobago initiated a process in the UN that culminated in the establishment of today's International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague. Currently PGA has its own lawyers in the Hague specializing in international law.

The Arab Spring has Not Really Affected Israel



Hirsh Goodman, Israeli security expert, and Karin Enström, (M) Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee in Swedish Parliament discussed the Arab spring and its implications for Israel's role in the region.

On November 16, Hirsh Goodman, Senior research associate at the Institute for National Security at Tel Aviv University, visited the Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation and voiced his opinion about “How the Arab Spring Changed Israel’s Role in the Middle East.” Karin Enström, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee presided over the seminar.

The audience of about 30 participants listened to Hirsh Goodman when he declared that much has been the same in the months following the Arab spring. Though, he is worried about all weapons that currently are in circulation in countries bordering to Israel – countries with in many respects unstable structures. Still he argued that Israel’s daily cooperation with Egypt works quite well.

“The bloodshed in Syria is likely to be prolonged”, said Hirsh Goodman and explained that in Israel a certain relief can be noted as the Arab

states now are looking inwards, towards their own. He also pointed out that the expectations of change, following the Arab spring, were not very high in Israel.

To a question from the audience, about Israel’s relation to Iran, Hirsh Goodman said that he does not worry much about Iran’s development of a nuclear weapons programme. He explained that Iran is well aware of Israel’s anti-missile systems, and that Israel has nuclear weapons, creating a power balance between the two countries.

As for Israel and its Palestinian population Hirsh Goodman noted that Israel must take Palestine seriously. If nothing changes, in ten years more Jews will live in the West Bank than Arabs in Israel (!).

“Urgent actions are required. Israel must do something about the West Bank. And we must be pragmatic.”



Reforming EU's Aid for Trade

The EU system of aid through trade should be as generous as possible, writes Christofer Fjellner, MEP and rapporteur for the issue to the European Parliament. "Free trade is the main tool to get countries to grow," he believes explaining how the generalised system of preferences currently is being revised.

The Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is EU's system of aid through trade. The structure has been around since 1971, dealing with large countries like India and China as well as small island nations. GSP is an important tool for the EU to help developing countries enter the European market. The value of imports through the system in 2009 amounted to about 60 billion euro, i.e. about 4 per cent of total EU imports.

The system has proven extremely important for the countries involved and has helped them become integrated into the global market. The additional benefits from the GSP + scheme have provided many countries with a boost to fulfil basic human rights, reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and good governance.

GSP means that you lower customs to help developing countries to increase their exports and boost economic growth. GSP is divided into: GSP, GSP + and EBA (Everything But Arms).

The basic arrangement, the standard GSP, is aimed at all countries where GDP per capita is less than approximately \$ 4,000 per year. These are considered by the World Bank to be lower-middle-income countries, receiving tariff preferences with the EU. If the World Bank's income limit is exceeded for three consecutive years the country lose its customs benefits with one year's notice. In addition, individual products or product areas might be excluded from the benefit system if these are growing significantly and becoming more competitive. In addition, a country may not enjoy the GSP benefits at the same time as other preferential arrangements such as FTAs.

GSP +, the so-called special incentive guide provide tariff reductions for exports to the EU but with further requirements. GSP + has the same financial requirements to qualify as GSP, but also the requirement that one should work for a sustainable development as well as good governance. This is done by signing and ratifying 27 UN conventions on environment, human rights and labour rights. If these commitments are not met benefits might be withdrawn, temporary or permanent.



Foto: Europaparlamentet

Finally, the EBA offers the least developed countries full duty-free access to EU market for all goods except arms. EBA is the newest part of the preference system and was introduced in 2004. The benefits a country enjoy by EBA remains even if the country is affected by other commercial benefit, for example a free trade agreement.

The goal is that a new system, according to a proposal presented by the Commission, should be simpler and more predictable, and focus more clearly on the most vulnerable countries. The plan is that the 176 countries currently included in the system will be reduced to about 80. The Commission wants, in its own words, to remove some of the big fish from the pond to give the smaller fish greater opportunities to grow. The reason is said to be that some countries have become too rich to be included. Therefore countries covered by the other preferential arrangements, particularly free trade agreements, are not to be included in the new system. Nor will countries and territories belonging to the EU, US or Australia will be covered.

My vision is that the system should be as generous as possible. Free trade is known to be the main tool to help countries to grow. This is especially important for vulnerable states. Furthermore, the system should be predictable, both for producers, importers and countries. We need a system which in good time makes it possible to foresee when a whole country or a product will be graduated out of the system. We also need a new system which the involved parties dare to use without risking unexpected economic blows or setbacks.

Christofer Fjellner, MEP