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UNITED RUSSIA WILL LEARN FROM CHINESE COMMUNISTS HOW TO LEAD THE MASSES

UNITED RUSSIA WILL LEARN FROM CHINESE COMMUNISTS HOW TO LEAD THE MASSES. (By Aleksandr Gabuyev. Kommersant, March 24, 2010, p. 8. Condensed text of first and complete text of second of two items:) **Editors' Note.** – Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping, who will most likely be China's next leader, met with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin yesterday in Moscow and opened a joint forum of the Chinese Communist Party and United Russia. The topic of discussion was "The Role of the Ruling Parties of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China in the Postcrisis Period." Kommersant correspondent Aleksandr Gabuyev, who attended the forum, learned that United Russia does not intend to blindly copy Beijing's ideas about governance; instead, the party wants to use them selectively. Members of Russia's party of power were especially interested in the methods their Chinese counterparts use to guide the masses and work with the media. Those methods could come in very handy for United Russia in 2012.

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Xi Jinping, who will head a greatly strengthened China in 2012, is winding up his first-ever visit to Russia today. Even though, as Kommersant was assured by the Russian prime minister's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, Mr. Xi was received in Russia "exclusively in his current capacity," his visit was still able to shed some light on the kind of role our mighty neighbor's future leadership has assigned to Russia. The answer to that question could be deduced from the very composition of the delegation that accompanied Mr. Xi to Russia: The highest-ranking government official in the delegation was Zhang Guobao, head of China's National Energy Administration. And when Xi Jinping met with Vladimir Putin, he said that "the second I set foot on Russian soil, I sensed the natural beauty of Russia." After that, the conversation was devoted largely to figuring out how to use that natural beauty for the needs of the Chinese economy. The key issues discussed at the talks were the construction of a branch of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline to go into China and plans for laying a pipeline through which Russian natural gas would flow to the Middle Kingdom.

But the Russian leadership is interested in China not only as a market for Russian energy sources and other natural resources, but also as a fountain of knowledge on building an effective political system. Yesterday morning, Xi Jinping began his day by meeting with Russian State Duma chairman Boris Gryzlov, and together they opened the forum for interparty dialogue between United Russia and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). . . .

However, who was playing the role of teacher and who was the student became clear only after Mr. Gryzlov and Mr. Xi had made their introductory remarks. The vice-president simply listed some indicators for the Chinese economy for the crisis year of 2009, including an 8.7% increase in gross domestic product. Boris Gryzlov maintained a discreet silence regarding last year's achievements of the Russian economy. "Our countries have had completely different experiences in emerging from the crisis, so for us China's experience can serve, if not as an example for imitation, then as something to study," Konstantin Kosachov [chairman of the State Duma's international affairs committee and a member of United Russia's general council] confided in a conversation with Kommersant. He then voiced the conclusion that Moscow had already reached: "China's experience indicates that a large government presence in the economy and a large party presence in the government can work."

This is not the first year that United Russia has borrowed the CCP's methods and experience. . . . For instance, at a conference in Shandong Province in November 2007, scholars from the Chinese State Council's Academy of Social Sciences championed ideas set forth in a "white paper" by the Chinese State Council entitled "China's System of Political Parties." In the document, the quintessence of China's experience in building a single-party regime was formulated as follows: "The CCP governs the country, and other parties help it in accordance with the law, but they never replace it. In China, a system of multiparty cooperation has replaced competition and rivalry between parties, thus removing political instability and frequent changes in the ruling regime."

At the same conference, Chinese participants aggressively promoted the report that CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao had delivered at the 17th Congress of the CCP in which he outlined an innovation-based strategy for China's development until 2020. Some points of the report are amazingly similar to Strategy 2020, which was published subsequently and served as the foundation of United Russia's platform in the December 2007 State Duma elections.

At yesterday's forum, representatives of the two ruling parties revisited the issue of a long-term strategy for the two countries' development. The first deputy secretary of the presidium of United Russia's general council, Andrei Isayev, described Strategy 2020 to the Chinese guests and, in response, the deputy director of the CCP Central Committee's Policy Research Office, He Yiting, familiarized the United Russia members with the concept of "scientifically substantiated development" formulated by CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao. In addition, the agenda included the international situation, increasing competitiveness through innovation, strengthening information support for the ideological and practical activity of the two ruling parties, strengthening personnel work and fighting corruption among party members. Members of the two parties spent all of yesterday recounting for each other their successes in those areas, with members of United Russia carefully writing down the main points of their Chinese comrades' speeches.

"No one is saying that United Russia intends to apply China's experience in our country – there won't be any outright copying," Konstantin Kosachov assured Kommersant. Nevertheless, the CCP's experience in some areas made a profound impression on the "United Russians." For instance, they showed great interest in the speech given by the deputy director of an office in the CCP Central Committee's Propaganda Department, Zhang Lei, who described for his Russian colleagues how Beijing organizes propaganda work with the masses and also with the media. According to Mr. Zhang, the essence of the CCP's approach to this issue is "to guide the masses, taking the lead in the area of information and shaping public opinion rather than following it." Zhang Lei also revealed some methods that Beijing uses to accomplish this

task: “The main role must be played by state-run and party-controlled media outlets, which must provide correct, accurate and reliable coverage of the authorities’ actions and describe the government’s anticrisis actions to the people.”

Speaking after Zhang Lei, Irina Yarovaya, vice-chairwoman of the State Duma’s committee on constitutional law and state-building, told her Chinese colleagues that United Russia had a different way of working with society. She said that the party assigns a major role to the creation of mechanisms for receiving feedback from the people, including the use of public reception offices. As for establishing control over the media, according to Ms. Yarovaya, Russia’s ruling party has no such plans. However, the deputy stressed that some changes do need to be made in this system, citing as an example the Russian media’s defeat in the information war during the conflict with Georgia in August 2008. Here, Irina Yarovaya agreed with Mr. Zhang’s idea that the ruling party must take the initiative and shape public opinion. “Those words alone, about the need to shape public opinion, made this entire forum worthwhile. That’s the main lesson,” a high-ranking United Russia member who took part in the dialogue told Kommersant. “After all, the West uses the same strategy, and when the US starts bombing Yugoslavia, people support it. But if we start bombing someone, people bite our heads off, both inside Russia and abroad. So we need to learn.”