

Sobyanin Portrait Emerges from Past

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Natalya Chestyakova-Yaroslavova, a senior member of Sergei Sobyanin's successful campaign team during the 2001 gubernatorial elections in the Tyumen region, says her former boss is a political fighter who knows how to work with foreign investors, isn't afraid to make tough decisions and took tight control of the local media as governor.

From Sobyanin's election until he moved to Moscow in 2005, Chestyakova-Yaroslavova kept in contact with him and his office, first as his aide for public communications and later as a senior manager at a Tyumen region energy company.

Here are some of her reflections on Sobyanin:

On information policy:

After Sergei Semyonovich [Sobyanin] came to power in the Tyumen region, all information channels were taken under his control. I personally saw how free speech shrank as more and more topics were censored.

On his supporters:

[His wife] Irina Sobyagina is interested in charity work ... but she will not be involved in business.

His team understands the language of symbols, myths and legends, and values them.

On his work style:

Sergei Sobyagin's behind-the-scenes mentality is close to that of private clubs and secret societies. This allows him to excel at contacts with those who are used to solving high-stakes issues in a small circle.

He is sharp and misses no details and hears what is said even if his face does not betray it.

He knows where the interests of global investors coincide with those of top Russian bureaucracy.

He has no problems ordering big budget decisions and is swift to change the rules to match his decisions on that. This makes him an effective representative of Russia's big capital, which is concentrated around taxes, benefits and access to profitable businesses.

He usually enters the game plan at the final stages of any given project and gives no credit to those who have carried the project that far.

Any position for him is only a stage.

On what to expect:

Rallies and public protests aren't really the format Sergei Sobyagin reacts to in the end. But he will surely backtrack to buy time in the short term. And while opponents will rejoice at his concessions, real changes will be implemented, lightning fast and without involving the general public. New money will usher in new people, new people will bring their own teams, and a new social and human rights bureaucracy will emerge.

I think things did not really work out in Tyumen between Sobyagin and the local intelligentsia and skilled professionals. He replaced the elites there almost completely.

But Sobyagin knows by heart the saying: "In order to be liked by the general public, spruce up the bazaar." And the pensioners, for example, are happy with a fountain he built in front of the Tyumen outdoor market.

The changes will be radical, but nothing is set in stone yet. A lot hangs now on the people whose opinions Sobyagin reacts to.

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