

Putin's anti-Western gestures

Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga

President Vladimir Putin has decided not to attend the G8 summit at Camp David, which is held on 18-19 May; this also means the cancellation of his planned meeting with Barack Obama. At the summit Putin will be replaced by the Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev. Russian president will not meet the President of the United States until the G20 summit in June in Mexico. At the same time, the Russian President's administration announced that his first trips abroad will be to Belarus and China. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin's first foreign guests in this presidential term were the leaders of the separatist republics of Abkhazia, Aleksandr Ankvab, and of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, whom he met on 11-12 May in Sochi.

Commentary

- The cancellation of President Putin's visit to Camp David was a big surprise for the US. Especially as because when it became clear in March that Putin did not intend to attend the NATO summit in Chicago (20-21 May), Washington decided to separate the G8 and NATO summits in order to facilitate the Russian president's arrival at the meeting of the 'big eight'. After Putin's decision was announced, a White House spokesman has suggested that Barack Obama might not go to the APEC summit in Vladivostok in September.
- The Russian president's absence from Camp David will be a demonstration of Moscow's dissatisfaction with US foreign policy. Russia's opposition derives above all from the US's position on the construction of its missile shield; its policies towards Afghanistan, Iran and North Africa; its criticism of the state of democracy and human rights in Russia; and its support for Russian NGOs, being regarded by the Kremlin as opposition.
- The president's withdrawal from the G8 summit, and the simultaneous announcement that he will attend the G20 summit, demonstrates a desire to move the centre of gravity of Russian foreign policy from the West towards non-Western countries. This is also indicated by the destinations of Putin's first trips as a president: China has emerged as a key international partner and coalition ally in the construction of a multi-polar world order. At the same time, the CIS remains a priority, wherein Russia is pushing through further integration projects. The signal that Russia wants to conduct a foreign policy which is conspicuously independent of the West has also been sent by Putin's meetings with the leaders of the breakaway Georgian republics, whose states are recognised by virtually

any other state but Russia.

- Putin's decision that the prime minister will represent him at Camp David is also a demonstration of the balance of power in the Russian ruling system. The official reason for the president's absence is his need to work on assembling Prime Minister Medvedev's new government, the composition of which will be announced after the PM returns from the US.