

**Introduction of Garry Kasparov by Michel Krielaars**

**December 12, 2015**

In Russia the 12th of December is Constitution Day, a national holiday to honour the constitution of 1993, written under Boris Yeltsin’s presidency. To protest against the continuous violation of this basic law by the Russian government, today about 80 people demonstrated individually on Pushkin Square in the centre of Moscow. Almost half of them were arrested, amongst them human rights activist Lev Ponomarev and the retired lawyer Georgi Satarov, one of the writers of this constitution.

About this Russia, a country where the basic laws are not respected by its rulers, the Russian chess grandmaster and opposition activist Garry Kasparov (1963) wrote a very sharp analysis: *Winter Is Coming*. In this alarming book he describes a country which is turning more and more into a fascist dictatorship.

In analyzing the background of Putin’s politics, he underlines that the Russian president is only concerned about his own interests and those of his cronies, a small group of old KGB-friends from his Leningrad days. To be able to defend them he has to stay in power as long as possible, because his days will be over if he steps down.

In times of a deteriorating economy (which was already in a very bad shape before the troubles in Ukraine started) Putin needs to continue to repress the opposition and the free media, because they promote the rule of democracy and transparency which are the biggest threats to authoritarian rule. Behind the façade Putin created of himself as the protector of the national interests of his country Kasparov sees a kleptocracy which is leading Russia into an abyss.

According to Kasparov Putin’s foreign policy is focused on weakening Western unity by sowing discord between EU-member states. The Kremlin is financing populist and right wing parties in countries like France, Serbia and Hungary.

Kasparov also takes the edge off the role of Russian state propaganda, which makes many Russians believe in the nationalistic and special course their country has taken. Therefore he doesn’t believe Putin’s high approval ratings of 89,9 percent: in a country where the rule of fear prevails nobody will express openly what he or she really thinks.

Kasparov is a hardliner when it comes to dealing with Russia. He accuses the West, and especially the US, of not standing up for human rights and the principles of liberal democracy, as it used to do during the Cold War. If it would have done so, and president Obama would have imposed heavy sanctions on Russia immediately after Putin’s annexation of the Crimea, probably a war in the Donbass and the bringing down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17 would never have taken place. Therefore Kasparov calls for a much tougher Western attitude stance against Moscow.

From his point of view negotiating with Putin – whom he describes as a dangerous dictator and an aggressive poker player - is not possible. The only recipe to stop his aggression is to show a huge, united fist. What is to be done? That is what we are going to discuss this evening.