

Democracy and Parties
in the Russian
Federation

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1. Tendencies Towards an Authoritarian Transformation of the Russian Democracy

The remarkable ability of Russian politicians to counteract positive developments in the first half of the year during the last half of the year repeated itself in 1994 and appeared to once again confirm those augurs eager to deny the predictability of Russian politics - and thus any forecasts relating to future political developments. Their main argument is that Russia is currently in a transitional period subject to peculiar constraints. Terms and categories used in Western social research cannot be applied here because we have no theory applying to such transitional periods. We are thus only able to identify, if anything, short-term trends, because everything is in a state of flux. The political sphere is dominant in this transitional period (this was also true of the defunct socialist social order), and processes of social and economic change are initiated and implemented "from above". This implies, on the one hand, a certain autonomy possessed by the political sphere vis à vis the economic sphere and its social actors. Russian politics thus often offers a contradictory and for the most part unreliable picture of incompatible decisions being made simultaneously by power centres which are far from co-ordinated in their actions, these power centres being the president, the Federation Council, the prime minister, ministries and the security apparatus.

There is little doubt that, on the other hand, the autonomy of the economic sphere can also be taken as a given. Because the state's agencies as well as its supervisory and dirigist institutions have only been insufficiently formed thus far, and as organised interest groups which are oriented towards long-term stability and order only exercise a limited influence on Russian politics, the economic sphere is subject to few political or legal constraints. Nor do groups acting free of constraints in this area have any interest in efficient government authorities developing at a quicker pace, as this would mean sanctions being applied against actors failing to comply with laws and regulations. This is the causal nexus, then, behind the corruption, abuse of power, favouritism and, ultimately, the power of organised crime. The Russian mafia has taken *de*

facto control of semi-state functions in the place of the inefficient, corrupt or absent authority of the state.

This thesis describes a social system and its machinery - that is, politics, the economy and the social sub-structure. It is a system which possesses scarcely any synchronisation, in which the political level is trying to shape economic structures - although it itself receives scarcely any guidance and distinctive actors who could act as a sort of corrective on the political process are only gradually crystallising along the lines of particular group interests. Professional economic associations, especially in the financial sector, have made the most progress here.

Because parties, in contrast, and trade unions (the overwhelming majority of which still cling to the old system) have still not been able to organise themselves behind a platform nor consolidate their positions in society, leadership in Russian politics is extremely "top-heavy". In spite of perestroika and glasnost and in spite of the breakdown of the old system in 1991, the leadership of the state is acting in a semi-legitimate realm, attempting to remove itself from the control of lower-placed, elected power-brokers. The concept of the "revolution from above" has survived in the post-Soviet era. This demonstrates the ability of the old elite to persevere, and suggests the continuing primacy of authoritarian-centralist views of the state structure - a situation which is buttressed by the constitution.

The weakness of parties, associations and social movements is multiplied by the impotence of the parliament vis à vis the executive level. The lack of parliamentary power is the flip side of an overly powerful president. It is omnipresent and critics complain that something like a new Politburo has taken over in the Kremlin, represented by a nomenclature which is only democratic in "formal" terms. It is not subject to any societal control, nor is the decision-making process transparent. One can only make conjectures as to who it is that influences the president, which groups and interests these 15,000 "advisors" are associated with, and how the president's decisions, which means his countless decrees, are made.

The effect of these decisions, even if they are not always thought through to their logical conclusion, is clear with regard to at least one point, however. The decrees emasculate the State Duma and *de facto* guaranty the president the legislative initiative. They are aimed - and this was their reasonable and progressive function during the transitional period - at accelerating reform-oriented legislation and they attempt to eliminate the presumed resistance of the opposition. Thus, the power of the State Duma is being reduced to the classic role of approving the budget and not much more. The decree-ocracy, which has reigned for years, is problematic because its manner of functioning as a constitutional body is being put in doubt.

The Federation Council, on the other hand, possibly because it is much less powerful than the State Duma, has thus far not moved into the Kremlin's line of fire. Open confrontations with the president have been avoided.

The why and how behind the military action being taken against the renegade Caucasus republic without consulting the parliament and the Federation Council demonstrate the *unrestrained power of the president and his apparatus*.

It appears to be undeniable that democratic development in Russia has reached a cross-roads.

On the one hand, it can no longer be ruled out that the military intervention in Chechnya ordered solely by the National Security Council alone is having a catalyst effect, accelerating the transformation into authoritarianism and jeopardising the continued existence of Russian democracy. On the other hand, the danger which is now perceived by all democratic forces is also forcing actors to co-operate more intensely than before. Talks, for instance, between Yavlinsky's "Yabloko" group and Gaidar's "Russia's Choice", and their joint action opposing the war have become possible for the first time. This rapprochement could produce real opportunities for those democratic forces in the still unorganised centre-left and the homogenous, powerfully organised, moderate-conservative and liberal-economic parts of the spectrum to finally join together in a broad tactical coalition in

order to stave off the danger of an authoritarian transformation of the Russian democracy.

2. Tendencies Towards Formation at the Political Level in the Russian Federation

New tendencies towards formation have arisen within and between political camps since last spring. Parties and party coalitions are considering their positions, looking around for ways to increase their power and if need be to find allies to form coalitions with in spite of the warning shots fired by Mr. Shumeiko, Chairman of the Federation Council, who together with President Yeltsin probably wanted to get a view of the probable reaction if they suspended elections to the State Duma or postponed them for two years.

The political realignment going on among parties and groups is a foreboding of the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in 1996. The political arena is in flux and new power constellations are beginning to crystallise. Democratic forces seem to have understood that here, for the first time, the consequences of the December elections were to spell out the path of future development for Russia once and for all. Although scarcely any party wants to go back to the way things were, everyone is grappling over the type of state which is to emerge, over what shape democracy is to take, over whether Russia is to develop into a federal state or whether tendencies towards authoritarian centralism will prevail again, and over which powers should be devolved upon the citizenry - and all these issues have yet to be decided.

A basic tendency already described above is looming larger than ever: In spite of the plethora of small groupings and splinter parties, there are essentially three greater tendencies in the Russian political arena, though four main currents (listed below) can presently be perceived. It is to be expected, however, that a rapprochement will take place between the left-centre and moderate communist faction (CPR). It cannot be ruled out that a process of coalescence will take place among the two extremist movements, the fascists and the radical communists.

1. The two extreme factions of rightists and communist leftists
2. A liberal-conservative movement grouped around "Russia's Choice"
3. A still heterogeneous left-centre faction whose platform and organisational centre forms around Gregory Yavlinsky and the "Yabloko" electoral block
4. The nomenclature parties, which have more or less already formed: the New Regional Policy Party, the Communists and the Agrarians, and the constructive left, which has joined together with populist forces to form the "Party of Unity and Accord".

Tendencies Towards a Coalescence of Forces on the Right and Left: the United Front

The prelude to a realignment of political parties began in the twin camps of fundamental opposition on the right and the left. The national council of the movement known as the "Party of Unity and Accord" met in Moscow on 28 May 1994 under the joint chairmanships of Alexander Rutskoi and Gennadei Syuganov (leader of the Russian Communist Party). Also invited were Sergei Glasyev (chairman of the State Duma's Economic Policy Committee and former Minister of Foreign Trade), Sergei Baburin (member of the State Duma and leader of the radical nationalist Russian People's Union) and prominent representatives of the opposition such as the former chairman of the supreme court, Valery Sorkin, Stanislav Govorochin (film director and former member of the Travkin faction) and economic leaders with close ties to the movement.

This new movement, ridiculed by many analysts as a rewarmed version of the "National Salvation Front", which was banned in 1993, has for the first time brought the Communist Party of the Russian Federation together with the Agrarian Party, which did not officially belong to the National Salvation Front. Radical communist splinter groups such as the Russian Communist Workers' Party (lead by

Anpilov) and the even more extreme splinter movement which it spawned, "Working Moscow", are not represented. On the right wing are extreme radical elements such as the Association of Officers (led by the infamous Lieutenant Colonel Terechov) and the fascist National Republicans (with Nicolai Lysenko at the top) no longer being represented, either.

Replacing them are the Russian People's Union (Nicolai Baburin), and the still imaginary social patriotic movement known as "Superpower/dershava" sponsored by the former Russian vice-president, Alexander Rutskoi, who was given amnesty in February 1994. Rutskoi intends to pull Russian traditionalists and nationalists together within this grouping. The mouthpiece of the rightist coalitional movement is the "Morning" newspaper (with Prochanov as chief editor), which one can describe without hesitation as a Russian variant of the nationally circulated "Storm and Stress". Rutskoi is no longer placing all his hopes in the right-wing coalitional movement. He continues to lead the significantly more important "Russian Social Democratic People's Party" (RSDPP), which split off from the old "Citizen's Union" and would like to win voters from the centre.

Also bidding for votes from the centre are in particular the social democratic wing of the RSDPP, (Vassily Lipitsky) and the Duma parliamentary group known as the Russian Democratic Party (although Travkin himself and his party have switched over to the government camp).

In the centre one also finds the new liberal patriots such as Valery Sorkin, Alexander Zipko (member of the Gorbachev Foundation and representative of the National Congress - Semelnyi Congress), Andrei Golovin and Alexander Krasnov (People's Alliance). The mere fact that the fundamental opposition on the right and the left have succeeded in launching a multi-strata tactical alliance is remarkable. Although some of the parties stated here attempted to toot their own horn into autumn - the "Social Democratic Union" with Lipitsky as one of its co-founders deserves special mention in this respect - actors and party groupings originally involved are being united in their opposition to Yeltsin's presidency. The actors involved are in no way political adventurers. Almost all of them belong to the old or new elite. The movement finds its support among a segment of regional elites, the

administrative leaders of local and regional bureaucracies and the managers of state-run enterprises. They have an informal network and are tied together by long years of personal and business relationships. Many of them are members of the State Duma and reject violence as a means of politics. This does not mean, however, that they would behave neutrally and passively in the event of mass protest and social unrest.

Whether such widely varying groups can produce something more than just a strategic oppositional alliance which will also be able to, for instance, form a new government, remains questionable. The contradictions remain too sharp on issues relating to political strategy, and party leaders are tangled up in their own personal ambitions.

There has not been, nor is there yet, any agreement over the issue of when and where new elections should take place.

Rutskoi and his supporters want to have the presidential elections moved up in time. Gennadei Syuganov counters that presidential elections would only benefit the democrats. First the constitution should be changed and the president made subordinate to parliament. Syuganov then would like to abolish the office of presidency. The relationship between the two crucial party leaders, Rutskoi and Syuganov, will decide whether the coalitional movement on the right, the "Party of Unity and Concord", can form a common front in the coming elections. The liberal patriots, however, are counting on the irreconcilable conflict remaining as such and believe that a neutral figure, such as, for example, Sorkin, will have a chance of being nominated as joint candidate for the presidency.

The movement is held together by a strange mixture of fundamental animosity towards Yeltsin and a minimum economic and foreign policy platform calling for a unified and strong Russia, the consolidation of post-Soviet territory with Russia as the leading power, but which also states that the reforms pushed through should not be rolled back. The plural coexistence of private and state-owned property is accepted, and the irreversibility of market economy developments is affirmed.

These points are sufficient to provide a platform for election campaigns. Whether the movement's objectives, especially of

attracting voters from the centre, can be attained through them, however, remains to be seen.

The room for manoeuvrability has become narrower for the "Party of Unity and Concord" because, for one thing, society has become more diverse, and for another thing because new political power constellations have crystallised since the October event of 1993. Radical forces have switched over to Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party. Thus, criticism can easily be levied against Gaidar, while Prime Minister Chernomyrdin remains largely unscathed.

Because the right wing is still occupied by populist and still-radical groups, this coalitional movement is also being squeezed into the centre, the reason being that, first of all, a political centre has still not formed. A second reason is that there is competition here with other political groups, namely the liberal-conservative forces behind Gaidar and the left-centrist groups in the electoral block led by Yavlinsky. The struggle for the left part of the centre has become more intense since the formation of the "Social Democratic Union" of Lipitsky and others. It will be extremely interesting to see whether Lipitsky will be successful in establishing his own independent position buttressed by a party platform to the right of the Communist Party under Syuganov, or whether his party shall merely serve to attract those groups of voters who harbour strong anti-communist sentiments and would never organise themselves in a Russian Communist Party and whether it will then form a radical leftist-socialist party which would then work indirectly with the "Party of Unity and Concord".

The events in Chechnya and the authoritarian tendencies transforming the Russian democracy have made new constellations of alliances possible. Syuganov's criticism of the military intervention and the joint action he took with Gaidar against the Government's policy were surprising. The CPR is also apprehensive about an authoritarian transformation of the state being carried out by the President's apparatus because it fears this would thwart its hopes of winning power by electoral means.



Formation of the Radical Left

Radical communist splinter groups tried in the middle of July 1994 to revive the Communist Union of Russia, which had already been in existence since August 1992. These efforts involved Victor Anpilov's Communist Workers' Party, the Russian Party of Communists (Anatoly Kryichkov) and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Sergei Chernyakovsky).

As the most important and largest political grouping of communists, the Communist Party of Russia, scorned by the radicals as a social-reform party, has already allied with moderate forces in the rightist coalitional movement, these groups have become a potential destabilising factor in politics rather than a true political power.

The Transformation of "Russia's Choice" into the "Russian Party of Democratic Choice"

In spite of its electoral defeat and limited factionalism, the one-time "presidential" party, the electoral block known as "Russia's Choice", led by Yego Gaidar, has proven to be amazingly stable. Within the framework of the movement which was turned into a party on 12 June, Boris Fydorov, former minister of finance, and the economist Irina Chakamada head a group of delegates in the State Duma which does not possess parliamentary party status and which is known as the Decembrists or "Union of 12 December".

In terms of their party platform, the "Union of 12 December" calls for a monetarist-libertarian course and is supported by private companies and banks. Gennadei Burbulis, who has not been heard from much lately, has switched over to this group. As no other party in the democratic camp, Gaidar has concentrated on successively and systematically forming a homogenous, regionally based party organisation for the coming elections.

Its party platform scarcely deviates from the basic positions of the old "Russia's Choice". But it also takes into account social changes which have increasingly stratified society according to income and

wealth just as it pays tribute to tendencies towards a renationalisation of Russian foreign policy. The party is not really looking for support among the 62.5% of Russians (96.5 million in absolute numbers) living below the poverty level (a level defined according to Russian criteria).

But it will certainly be welcomed by those social strata which earn between 60,000 and 500,000 roubles a month (60 to 500 deutschmarks) and which forms the new Russian middle class.

The party enjoys much greater support among the "novi russky", the "new Russians", which means those groups which earn between 2.5 and 3 million roubles per month. This group numbers around 6.5 million, which is approximately 3.6% of the population. Whether the super-rich, with monthly incomes exceeding 50 million roubles, and who make up about 0.7% of the population, are politically motivated at all, is doubtful. Nevertheless, Gaidar has succeeded in winning financial support for his party from numerous companies and associations. Its development into a moderately nationalistic, liberal economic party practically modelled along western European lines, appears to be inevitable.

The war against Chechnya has put the party in a difficult position. Well-known party members, such as the chairman of the Defense Committee, Sergei Yushenkov, have called for the resignation and even the impeachment of Yeltsin. Gaidar has become a bitter critic of the president.

The party is split over this issue. One faction continues to hedge the hope that Yeltsin is the lesser evil and that he will continue to push the democratic reform process along, thus ensuring that problems are solved democratically. The overwhelming majority, on the other hand, considers Yeltsin either to be part of the problem or *the problem itself* - and one which can only be solved by his resignation if Russia is to move forward.

This juncture opens up possibilities for co-operation among democratic movements. Thus, the co-ordinated arrangements and the joint action taken by Gaidar and Yavlinsky against the war in Chechnya have for the first time helped improve the prospects for action to be taken on a common front.

Tendencies towards Coalescence among Left-of-Centre Groups: the project for a "United Social Democratic Party"

If "Russia's Choice" has faced the task of transforming itself into a party, the "Yabloko" electoral block has had the opposite chore. The electoral block is composed of a plethora of smaller parties which have thus far aroused attention primarily due to their factionalism and in-fighting over which direction to take and which, in spite of similar platforms, has hardly been able to pull itself together enough to take joint political action. The block is held together by that towering figure and favourite of the Russian intelligencia, Gregory Yavlinsky, who does not hide his presidential ambitions. This state of affairs, however, cripples the group because Yavlinsky does not think and act enough in terms of the tedious organisational and parliamentary work which is required. The impetus needed to turn this loosely-held-together electoral block into a powerful, regionally-based party has not yet materialised and when it is called for, the leader of the block withdraws, his reason being that as president to be one cannot be obligated to only one party! Thus efforts to turn the parties to the left of "Russia's Choice" into a larger coalition, for the sake of simplicity let us just call it a social democratic one, have only made limited progress thus far. Paradoxically, the conditions needed for this to come about are not all that unpropitious. The media is going on and on about how desirable it would be to have a Russian social democracy, but in the same breath do not give it any hope of succeeding. This is not because they are against it, but because the name has had a bad ring since 1917 and even more so since Gorbachev's attempt to transform the CPSU into a true social democracy failed.

Serious efforts have been made for the first time since April 1994 to strengthen the fragile basis of the Russian Social Democratic Party, the RSDP, by forming alliances and merging parties. Although the RSDP stabilised itself by virtue of the December elections and under the leadership of Anatoly Golov, they have never been able to overcome the shortcoming of not having sufficient political personalities who are perceived and taken seriously by the populace. The problem should have been approached by making offers to other democratic parties, including the new independent

and democratic trade unions, whose positions and demands are oriented along social democratic lines.

Together with a host of small democratic and left-leaning groups the leadership of the RSDP and the Russian Movement for Democrats formed a new coalitional movement on 21 September 1994. The new "United Social Democratic Party", if this name continues to only serve as a working name in the future, views itself as a political power at the centre, to the left of Gaidar's "Russia's Choice" party and to the right of the Communists and nationalist forces. It poses as the champion of the new Russian constitution and intends to become an integral part of the opposition to the political course being pursued by the government.

Alexander Yakovlev, head of the Ostankino T.V. station and co-founder of the new movement, and Marshall Yevgeni Shaposhnikov, former commander of the CIS troops under Gorbachev, were the co-founders of the new movement. Prominent economists such as Mr. Shmelov and Mr. Shatalin from the perestroika era, well-known political scientists such as Alexei Kiva, Yuri Boldyrev from the Yabloko block and Vadim Bakhatin, former head of the KGB under Gorbachev, are also active members.

Without a doubt, what is interesting about this development is that politically homeless reformers from the perestroika era are once again pressing into the political arena.

At the same time this group is polarising, with one part, possibly even under the influence of Gorbachev, wanting to organise itself into another electoral commission consisting of Lipitsky and O. Rumansiev, and left-leaning splinter groups from the RSDP led by Pavel Kydyukin and Alexander Averkiev.

The following Social Democratic tendencies can be identified:

- * the Russian Social Democratic Party under A. Golov
- * the organisational committee known as the "United Social Democratic Party"
- * the founding of the "Social Democratic Union" by Lipitsky et al.

The Constitution of the Social Democratic Union

The Social Democratic Union was constituted under the leadership of Lipitsky, O. Rumansiev and Igor Jürgens on 30 October 1994. The main speech at the inaugural party congress was given by Gorbachev, who labelled all other social democratic initiatives as betrayals of the common cause because they furthered the Government's and the president's efforts to promote factionalism.

The new party defined itself as an independent part of the fundamental opposition to the government and attempted to attract voters not only among groups of young, uncommitted new elites who were disappointed in the reform course, but also among cadres in the bureaucracy, the economic apparatus and the non-reformed trade unions.

This party may well approach the regional organisations of the social democratic wing of the old Citizens' Union, offering an effective organisational potential and a large number of active members. The proximity to the old trade unions offers potential access not only to trade union members - it also makes the party favourably disposed to capital and material support.

Whether the party to the right of the CPR which appeals to a similar electoral strata and offers a similar platform can establish itself remains to be seen.

As a result of intensifying political developments on the domestic front a result of the war in Chechnya, the new party can be an important hinge in the anti-Yeltsin campaign. It is willing to talk to any party. Similar to the CPR, it must resist open authoritarian tendencies, because it would stand to lose by such a development. This does not mean, however, that it would not take an authoritarian path itself if it came to power. Its democratic orientation remains dubious, and not only due to its incongruent constituency.

The "United Social Democratic Party" Organisational Committee

Since those groups surrounding Yakovlev, Shaposhnikov et al loudly announced preliminary efforts to establish a new social democratic party were almost completed in the period leading up to December 1994, things have quieted down considerably. Some of the members such as G. Popov have left this camp. Others are already intent on dividing up the bearskin before the bear is dead and are bogged down in an absurd dispute over leadership positions in a party that does not even exist yet.

But this initiative is being threatened with oblivion from another side.

Shortly after the initiative was founded by Yakovlev and Shaposhnikov the story was circulated that the new Social Democratic Party was a puppet party of the Kremlin's. Dreamed up and supported by consultants (Zatsiev) who were once put into the president's apparatus for that purpose, they wanted to create a new party true to the old tradition of "from above".

The idea is basically plausible. Haven't Yeltsin's consultants recognised that the former presidential party, "Russia's Choice", is too small to help Yeltsin win again running as its candidate? Their analysis is therefore correct in asserting that the non-organised, squabbling political centre must be provided a structure through a new party in order to garner all these forces which do not support Gaidar's party. It is only in this way that nationalistic or radical leftist candidates can be stopped and perhaps obtain an electoral victory for Yeltsin once again.

This option has been completely negated by the events in Chechnya. At the same time we have been able to see how consultants surrounding Yeltsin who are oriented towards a political strategy of democratic development have been marginalised onto the political periphery. Meanwhile, forces seeking authoritarian solutions hold the sway, as those taking the long route via political election strategies seem to offer less hope of success. It is to be hoped that the cadre mobilised at the beginning is now prepared to become active once again in helping to regroup the political centre.

Deciding the power issue in the Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDP)

The leadership of the RSDP under Anatoly Golov was initially prepared to serve the party within the framework of the initiative known as the "United Social Democratic Party".

In the meantime, the left wing of the party - Kudyukin et al - switched over to Lipitsky after it tried to seize the leadership of the party in a lightning move at the end of October.

The legal party congress of the RSDP took place in Moscow on 17-18 December and upheld A. Golov in his office of party leader. The left wing was not formally excluded.

If the RSDP seeks the path of establishing a broad social democratic coalitional movement, the new situation will hold out interesting prospects for it, as it can only profit from a tactical or defensive alliance among democratic powers against authoritarian tendencies, the reason being that this would once again offer the opportunity to form a broader movement more receptive to social issues and the actual needs of the population. It is only by mobilising the population, as difficult as that may be in view of political apathy and widespread disillusion, that authoritarian and repressive tendencies can be warded off. If this danger is successfully averted, a broad democratic mass movement could then develop and truly offer political parties a new beginning - from the bottom up.