

2006

# Russian Federation

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## Recommended Citation

Hass, Jeffrey K. "Russian Federation." In *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties*, edited by Neil Schlager, Jayne Weisblatt, and Orlando J. Pérez, 1127-142. 4th ed. Vol. 3. New York: Facts On File, 2006.

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# RUSSIAN FEDERATION

(Rossiiskaya Federatsiya)

*By Jeffrey K. Hass, Ph.D.*



The Russian political system remains subject to sudden radical change—this has been the basic logic of its political history since 1985. Only by understanding the processes and logics of that recent history of change can one understand the present and the (possibly radically different) future.

In December 1991 Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (the USSR's largest republic, known as RSFSR), joined Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus and Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine in dissolving the Soviet Union and replacing it with the ill-defined Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The RSFSR was transformed into the Russian Federation, and the process of political transformation and state building was under way, and it continues apace.

Prior to December 1991 Russia was the largest of 15 republics in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (RSFSR). In 1991 Boris Yeltsin won the RSFSR presidential race, defeating Nikolai Ryzhkov and ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskii. Throughout 1991, in conflict with and defiance of the USSR government, the RSFSR began claiming political authority and sovereignty. In December 1991 in the Belorussian town of Belovezhsk, Yeltsin, Kravchuk, and Shushkevich dissolved the Soviet Union. This marked a culmination of the centrifugal forces that had been pulling the USSR apart. The Russian government claimed political sovereignty and inherited Soviet institutions such as Gosbank (the State Bank), the KGB (reorganized as the FSB, the Federal Security Council), the

executive branch, headed by Yeltsin, and the Supreme Soviet as the legislative branch (headed then by Ruslan Khasbulatov).

Relations between the executive and the legislature were calm in 1992, and Yeltsin received a year of emergency powers (when presidential decrees had the force of law) to pursue a "shock therapy" program. Under Yegor Gaidar's watch (as minister of finance and later deputy prime minister), price and trade liberalization and a brief stint of tight monetary policy were implemented. However, initial inflationary shocks, rising inter-enterprise debt, the collapse of trade relations between republics, wage arrears, and political intrigue led to near economic collapse. To prevent the economy from seizing up, the Central Bank injected money into the system, resulting in hyperinflation (around 2,500 percent for 1992). By December 1992 conservatives in the Supreme Soviet and society reacted negatively to market reforms and demanded policy changes. Yeltsin answered by offering Viktor Chernomyrdin, former head of the natural gas monopoly Gazprom, as prime minister. Chernomyrdin turned out to be more of a market-reformer than Gaidar, pushing privatization with his aide Anatolii Chubais, introducing embryonic bankruptcy laws, and restricting further emissions of state subsidies.

However, the battle over economic policy soon became a conflict over the power to set agendas and pitted Yeltsin against legislative speaker Khasbulatov and the conservative Supreme Soviet. The rivalry was

decided in September–October 1993, when Yeltsin disbanded the Supreme Soviet and called for new elections. Khasbulatov and Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi staged a sit-in in the “White House,” the home of the Supreme Soviet. A crowd of Khasbulatov-Rutskoi supporters gathered outside the White House and, riled by Rutskoi, stormed toward the Ostankino television station. Defense minister Pavel Grachev, on Yeltsin’s orders, commanded the tanks and troops to bombard and then assault the White House. After the elapse of several days and suffering some casualties, the rebels surrendered and Yeltsin emerged victorious. After the “October events” Yeltsin called for a double vote in December, namely, for a new parliament and a new constitution.

The results of the December 1993 elections stunned reformers: while the electoral bloc of Yegor Gaidar’s party, Russia’s Choice, emerged as the largest winner, the Communists had reemerged with new strength, and Vladimir Zhirinovskii’s Russian Liberal Democratic Party emerged as the clear winner on the party ballots. The pain of economic reform and the blood of the October events had soured voter opinion of the democrats. Yeltsin had given no public support for democrats, nor had he founded his own party for the Duma elections; as a result, democrats were split, especially between Gaidar’s group and the alternative reform camp led by Grigorii Yavlinskii’s “Yabloko” Party. Nationalists (especially the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) and Communists tapped into the pain, shame, and anger rising up in society. The new Duma threatened to be no more helpful than the defunct Supreme Soviet.

The year 1994 opened with hired killings of mafia (*mafii*) bosses and bankers, and with reports of increasing corruption in the government and mafia influence over the economy. The annual inflationary surge in August 1994 pushed up prices in September and, along with possible intrigues by major banks and the Central Bank, led to “Black Tuesday”—on October 10 and 11 the ruble lost 40 percent of its value relative to the dollar. While the ruble temporarily regained most of its lost value, Chernomyrdin’s government was reshuffled and the prime minister himself was nearly sacked. Viktor Gerashchenko resigned as the Central Bank chairman and was replaced by Tatiana Paramonova, who would later implement the ruble corridor (a band of acceptable limits on ruble-dollar exchange rates) and would introduce financial discipline to private banks.

## INVASION OF CHECHNYA

In December 1994 the Russian political scene was shaken by the sudden invasion of Chechnya—the decision to invade was taken without Duma consultations or public debate and because the defense minister, Grachev, had been practicing shuttle diplomacy with Chechen leaders. The war led not only to a financial drain on the state but, more importantly, also to increased political tensions and social outrage against Yeltsin and his government and to tensions within the military. From the first military engagements, the Russian media carried images of war and its ravages into the homes of Russians. Several political parties, including democrats and Communists, reacted negatively to Yeltsin’s decision. (Zhirinovskii and his Liberal Democrats supported the invasion.) Social groups began to protest the war; most vehement in condemnation was the Soldiers’ Mothers Association, a group that sent petitions to the executive and legislature, forwarded documentation on the war to foreign groups such as the United Nations, and harbored AWOL soldiers. Finally, low pay, bad living conditions, and the lack of quick military success hurt a morale already in decline, battered by the generally low level of army conditions and by abuses by soldiers and officers within divisions.

In 1995 Yeltsin’s health worsened. Political stability was threatened by growing discontent with the Chechen war. In June 1995 Chechen rebels occupied a hospital and took hostages in the town of Budennovsk. Rumors throughout Moscow were rife that Yeltsin would keep the prime minister and the government and disband the Duma and call for new parliamentary elections. The year ended with elections to the Sixth Duma. Riding on a wave of growing discontent due to economic reforms, the Communist Party, headed by Gennadyi Zyuganov, claimed more than 20 percent of the votes and 157 seats overall. Supported by the older generations, who had suffered from inflation, investment fraud, and unpaid pensions, the Communists returned to politics, a return that led to power games between blocs in early 1996. With Yeltsin’s popularity low early in the presidential race (behind Zyuganov, popular retired general Aleksandr Lebed, and Yabloko leader Grigorii Yavlinskii), some members of the presidential staff—especially the chief of presidential security and Yeltsin confidant Aleksandr Korzhakov—called for postponement of the presidential elections. However, aided by American campaign consultants and promises of public spending to alleviate wage arrears and to fund public projects, Yeltsin managed to turn the tide and win enough votes to enter the

second round to face Zyuganov. Yeltsin offered Lebed a position in the cabinet in return for support; Lebed had received 15 percent of the votes cast and had a positive reputation as honest, competent, and strong-willed. His support, along with Zyuganov's inability to move beyond the 20 percent of the electorate loyal to the Communists, allowed Yeltsin to win the July 1996 presidential election.

Soon afterward, however, Yeltsin's health declined; he had already dropped out of sight between the first and second rounds because of heart problems and required triple-bypass surgery. Lebed's popularity only increased as he worked out a cease-fire in Chechnya and promised to root out corruption. Political intrigue against Lebed—Chernomyrdin and Chubais "insiders" versus Lebed the "outsider"—led ultimately to Yeltsin's firing Lebed in the fall of 1996. Lebed's ultimate sin had been his independence and confidence in his own abilities and popularity; these traits did little to endear him to Chernomyrdin and Chubais. Lebed exited the government and began to form his own political machine, preparing for a bid at the presidency should Yeltsin leave office before the end of his five-year term. (The popular general-turned-governor was killed in a freak helicopter crash in 2003, removing one potential future presidential candidate from the field.)

The years 1997 and 1998 were not calm for Russian democracy, as Yeltsin continued to appear frail physically and yet flex his muscles politically. On March 23, 1998, he dissolved his cabinet, including Chernomyrdin, because of its inability to cope with wage and pension arrears and to speed up reforms. Yeltsin appointed Sergei Kirienko, a 35-year-old former energy minister with little experience at the helm and a member of the "Nemtsov family," as the prime minister designate. Anatolii Chubais, under siege from enemies for scandals and for favors to allies (such as Moscow banks), was finally out of the cabinet but would remain somewhere on Yeltsin's team. Foreign investors looked favorably upon Chubais for his ability to keep reforms on course, and Yeltsin could not simply discard Chubais. Boris Nemtsov, the young reformer brought into the cabinet in the spring of 1997, remained as an acting deputy minister; his charisma and reformist image could not be thrown overboard if Yeltsin was to maintain any degree of outward trappings as a reformer. But his steadfast ally and potential rival Viktor Chernomyrdin was gone.

The new situation was not to last long, for in August 1998, Yeltsin sacked his cabinet again. After trying to convince the Duma to support Viktor Chernomyrdin's return, Yeltsin turned to Yevgenii Primakov, a former

Gorbachev aide and former foreign minister. This appeared to be a victory for Communists and leftists and a serious defeat for Yeltsin and his allies in the reformer and banking camps; in fact, Yeltsin appeared weak and tired after the affair, and Primakov de facto assumed more powers than previous prime ministers in running Russia.

Russian politics in Yeltsin's last years revolved around two important informal groups that grew out of the backroom politics and horse-trading of economic reform. The first group was "the Family," the informal inner circle around Yeltsin made up of his daughter Tatiana Diachenko, presidential secretary Aleksandr Voloshin, and oligarch Boris Berezovskii. They were the ailing Yeltsin's closest advisers after 1996, and they acted as gatekeepers to the feeble president. The second group was the "oligarchs." These were Russia's richest elites, who had made their fortunes buying Russian enterprises cheap during the course of privatization thanks to political connections to Anatolii Chubais (the executive of the privatization policy) and Yeltsin. Lucrative firms were sold to Boris Berezovskii (Aeroflot, aluminum firms), Mikhail Khodorkovskii (Menatep financial group, oil firms that became Yukos), Roman Abramovich (oil firms that became Sibneft, aluminum firms), Vladimir Gusinskii (media empires), and Vladimir Potanin (Interros financial group, Norilsk Nickel). The oligarchs traded loyalty to Yeltsin for the chance to create property empires, and they repaid their debt by financing his 1996 presidential election bid and then supporting Vladimir Putin (heir to Yeltsin and defender of the Family) in the 1999 Duma elections.

## RISE OF VLADIMIR PUTIN

In 1999, sensing a chance for power, Moscow mayor Yurii Luzhkov made use of his popularity as a strong leader who could bring order by establishing the party Fatherland (Otechestvo) and uniting it with All Russia (Vsya Rossiia). This coalition threatened Yeltsin and the Family. To tackle the threat Yeltsin sacked Primakov—who promptly joined Luzhkov's coalition—and named Sergei Stepashin to be prime minister. In August 1999 Yeltsin sacked Stepashin for his refusal to attack Luzhkov, and named Vladimir Putin, head of the security services, to the position. To observers Putin appeared to be a loyal heir who would defend the interests of Yeltsin and the Family. In the second half of 1999 Putin sent troops back into Chechnya following a series of raids by rebels into neighboring Dagestan and on apartment bombings in Moscow, supposedly pulled off by Chechen rebels. This helped his popularity by

giving him an image of strength and resolution. In the 1999 Duma elections, Putin and Berezovskii unleashed media allies against Luzhkov, for all practical purposes slandering him with accusations of corruption and opportunism, among other things. Further, Putin put his support behind Unity (Edinstvo), a loose party made up of various individuals and elites linked more by ties to the Kremlin inner circle or a desire for opportunistic gain than by shared ideological hopes. Willing to trade political loyalty for a share of political power and gains in Moscow, they were favored by Putin and the Putin-friendly media. While the Fatherland-All Russia coalition gained seats in the Duma, Unity emerged triumphant. The threat from Luzhkov, or any serious competition, was neutralized.

His health failing, Yeltsin suddenly resigned on December 31, 1999, making Putin acting president. In 2000 Putin won the presidential election in his own right, defeating perennial Communist candidate Gennady Zyuganov. Putin portrayed an image of quiet determination and strength and to many represented what Russia needed, an iron fist of order and discipline (an image aided by his KGB background, his lack of affiliation with 1990s privatization and corruption, and his unbending decision to end rebellion in Chechnya). Following the collapse of the ruble in 1998 and NATO bombings of Serbia in 1999 (Serbs were widely seen as brother Orthodox Slavs), a feeling of anger at the West and the political elite heated up, and Putin played to this sense of national betrayal with pseudo-nationalist trappings and tactics: from restoring the Soviet-era national anthem (with different words) to televising individual meetings with ministers demonstrating his authority over the government to a stress on the "dictatorship of law" and renewal of national security and strength.

In keeping with his image, Putin began to gather political power around himself. His first real act of power was an attack on oligarchs who had helped him rise to power and who threatened to constrain him, as they had Yeltsin. From his position as head of the security apparatus Putin had two tools. First, he had connections to fellow *siloviki*—members of the security apparatus, including the FSB (Federaln'aya Sluzhba Bezopastnosti, Federal Security Service, the former KGB)—who followed him into the Kremlin. *Siloviki* had been the one major group that had lost out in the 1990s: they not gained from privatization and economic liberalization as had other Communist Party-era nomenklatura elites (such as oligarchs or Red directors), and Yeltsin had weakened the KGB's powers when he reorganized them into the FSB. *Siloviki* were

spread throughout the state apparatus, from Moscow to the provinces, and they were ready to return to power. Putin's second tool was access to *kompromat*, namely, compromising materials, usually information on illegal or questionable activities (e.g., tax fraud) committed by the oligarchs and others. Yeltsin unleashed the *siloviki* and *kompromat* against Berezovskii and Vladimir Gusinskii—both of whom controlled important newspapers and television stations (e.g., the popular television station NTV, which had been critical of the war in Chechnya) that had helped promote Yeltsin's image in 1996 and 1999 and who had destroyed Luzhkov's in 1999. Once again threatened with an investigation and prison, Berezovskii fled to the United Kingdom, where he remains a refugee and occasional news commentator. Gusinskii's MOST Group empire and NTV were threatened with bankruptcy over unpaid debts and potential prosecution. Gusinskii sold his media empire, including NTV, to the state-run natural gas monopoly Gazprom—putting important media outlets indirectly in Putin's hands. Gusinskii then fled to Greece. The remaining oligarchs and regional governors quickly fell in line, and Putin began proposing reform legislation.

The rise in oil prices after 2000 helped Russia's economy and state budget, but the war in Chechnya remained inconclusive. With presidential elections coming in 2004, and the question of a successor to Putin in 2008 further on the horizon, Putin and the *siloviki* became nervous about potential competition that could hurt their interests. A competitor emerged in 2003: oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovskii, Russia's richest man and head of the financial empire Menatep and the oil giant Yukos. A slick young oligarch who championed transparency and modern capitalist methods of operation—for example, he opened Yukos' financial books to external scrutiny—Khodorkovskii gave money to various political parties and quipped that one day he would leave business for other interests, that is, politics. In July 2003 the *siloviki* arrested an assistant manager at Yukos on charges of murder, opened an investigation in tax fraud at Yukos—an ironic punishment for accounting transparency, rare in Russia—and arrested Khodorkovskii for tax fraud. Despite a vigorous defense against the charges and proposals to pay the tax debt (including offers from the Chinese government, who relied on Yukos oil), Putin and *siloviki* continued to attack Yukos, Russia's economic champion and post-Soviet success story. Other oligarchs did not come to Khodorkovskii's aid and towed Putin's line, while Roman Abramovich, head of oil giant Sibneft, quickly

shifted hundreds of millions of dollars from Russia to the Chelsea Football Club in Britain.

In 2003 a new round of Duma elections took place, and Putin's party renamed itself United Russia (Edinaia Rossiia). United Russia displaced the Communists as the largest party in the Duma, and the nationalist Liberal Democrats and Motherland parties—generally friendly to Putin—shored up Putin's influence in the lower house. Right-wing, pro-reform parties such as Yaboko or the Union of Right Forces did not overcome the 5 percent electoral barrier—for the first time since the heyday of Gorbachev's reforms, a pro-democracy, pro-reform party did not gain seats through proportional representation, and had to rely on individuals winning local first-past-the-post contests. In 2004 Putin easily defeated competitors in the presidential race in the first round—the Communists put forward someone other than Zyuganov and other parties nominated symbolic candidates to create a façade of a democratic competitive election. In September 2004 Chechen terrorists under orders of Shamil Besayev took approximately 1,000 adults and children hostage in a school in the North Ossetian town of Beslan, and, in a freak series of accidents, killed a third of the adults and children. Amidst the national and international outcry against this horrifying event and the Chechen rebels, Putin announced measures to combat terrorism and security threats, including more direct control of the selection of local governors and the Duma.

## The System of Government

The Russian state is a federation of 21 autonomous republics, 49 oblasts, 10 autonomous *okrugs*, and 1 autonomous oblast. Autonomous republics are akin to ethnic enclaves within Russia, similar to the republics of the former Soviet Union. Oblasts are equivalent to provinces and are headed by governors, traditionally selected through competitive elections but since 2004 appointed by the president.

### EXECUTIVE

According to the 1993 constitution, ultimate executive authority rests with the president of the Russian Federation. The Russian presidency resembles that of France. The president is as much a political "overseer" as head of state and government, setting the general course for the country, issuing presidential edicts (*ukazy*),

and acting as a final arbiter between the executive and legislative branches. In this way, the president is part of the executive but also above it in that the duties of president encompass the entire political realm of process and stability and not just the executive duties of implementing legislation. A telling sign of this is the president's power to dismiss both the Duma and the ministers. The president is aided by the Presidential Administration, run by the head of the Presidential Administration. This Administration includes the Security Council, the Defense Council, presidential aides, and the Administration of Affairs of the president. The Security Council looks after Russia's national and political security.

If the president is the overall *political* leader, the head of the day-to-day workings of the executive branch is the prime minister. The prime minister is aided by four deputy prime ministers and a cabinet of heads of ministries and state committees, including the Ministries of Finance, Justice, Defense, Education, Transportation, and Communications, the Committees on Industrial Policy, Land Reform, State Property Management, and Bankruptcy, and others. These ministries manage the day-to-day activities of the executive branch, which includes controlling federal property and payments, regulating customs and borders, running the armed forces, collecting taxes, and the like. The prime minister and various ministers and heads of state committees are appointed by the president and are subject to approval by the Duma. The duties of the ministers include shaping policy, ensuring fulfillment of legislation and policy, administering state property, and executing financial policy (payments and taxes).

The real power of the executive is greater than in many Western nations. This is due to three factors. First, historical legacy and political culture support a strong central figure over a body such as parliament; second, the urgent nature of economic reforms supports a strong central figure who can decree immediate policy; and finally, a strong executive was designed to solve the problem of conflicts between executive and legislature that plagued Yeltsin in 1992–93. These factors come from institutional rules (such as the constitution) as well as from Yeltsin's own political strategies and capital.

Presidential power was not always so great. The Soviet constitution granted final power to the Congress of People's Deputies; Yeltsin's 1991 addition to that document made the president the "highest official" of the RSFSR, and the contradiction between the two articles helped set the stage for executive-legislative conflict in 1992. With the three factors above dovetail-

ing in 1993, the writers of Russia's constitution (under Yeltsin's influence) granted extensive powers to the president.

First, the laws of the land include not only legislation passed by parliament but also presidential decrees; this is a legacy of Yeltsin's year of emergency powers to promote shock therapy. Presidential decrees have the advantage that they do not require parliamentary debate and two (or three) separate votes, as is the case for Duma legislation. In theory, presidential decrees are invalid if they contradict Duma-approved legislation; however, solving potential contradictions is usually left to the courts, to political compromise, or to the whim of the bureaucrat making the decision at the time.

Second, the executive wields power over the military and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the nationwide police), and the president holds the authority to use military force where he sees fit. This was the case with Chechnya, for example, where Yeltsin authorized the use of the army to compel obedience from the breakaway republic. When legislative members protested this use of force before the Supreme Court, the Court upheld the president's authority to use military force without direct interference from parliament. Finally, because the executive runs the state bureaucracy, directives and "letters" of the various ministries can shape political, economic, and social life.

The power of the president stems also from the fact that he is not simply part of the political system; he stands above it. This can be seen in the system's checks and balances. While the legislative branch can open formal impeachment proceedings, the president also has the power to dissolve the Duma or the entire parliament and call for new elections, for example, in the case of a vote of no confidence. The president can, in the end, avoid the checks and balances by simply ignoring the legislature.

Checks on executive power are problematic. In 1992 and 1993, the Supreme Soviet acted as a check on the president by emitting contradictory legislative decrees and by challenging the legality of Yeltsin's policies. However, the legislature still holds two important levers of power over the president. The first is control over finances: expenditures and the actual yearly state budget must pass through parliament. The second lever is that the legislature can oust the executive, either by a vote of no confidence in the government or by impeachment of the president. However, this check is precarious: the measure must pass *twice*, and after the first reading the prime minister can demand an immediate second vote. If the Duma passes the no-confidence measure a second time, the president has the

option either to dismiss the existing government and name a new prime minister and cabinet or to dismiss the sitting Duma and set new elections for parliament. Finally, executive actions must follow the constitution; violation may lead to overturning of executive policies and, in egregious instances, to impeachment.

Putin has acted to enhance presidential power even further. He has used *kompromat*—informal power—to bring the Duma and regional governors into line. This has enabled him to pass reform legislation that Yeltsin could not, for example, on the sale of land. Early in his first term, Putin created the "presidential vertical," presidential representatives to "super-regions" comprising groups of oblasts. These representatives monitor the behavior of local legislatures and governors, although they have not been as effective a tool for Putin's control of the regions as initially envisioned. Finally, Putin in 2004 pushed through a new means of enhancing the "presidential vertical": revising electoral rules so that the president appoints regional governors. Interestingly, Putin has been following a watered-down version of Aleksandr Lukashenko's strategy of vertical presidential power in Belarus; however, Putin does permit more autonomy to the legislature.

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#### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, MARCH 14, 2004

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| Candidate          | % votes received |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Vladimir Putin     | 71.2%            |
| Nikolai Charitonov | 13.7%            |
| Sergei Glazev      | 4.1%             |
| Irina Khakamada    | 3.9%             |
| Oleg Malyshev      | 2%               |
| Sergei Mironov     | 0.8%             |

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Source: [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)

## LEGISLATURE

The national legislature is a bicameral body, composed of the upper house, the Federation Council (Soviet Federatsii), and the lower house, the State Duma (Gosudarstvennaia Duma). The purpose of both bodies is to introduce, debate, and pass legislation for the Russian Federation and to act as a check on executive powers. The current system was introduced at the end of 1993, after the October events and the dissolution

of the Supreme Soviet, and with the introduction of Russia's new constitution and Duma elections. The process of forming the Duma has been relatively straightforward. The Federation Council has been developing more slowly.

The Federation Council is composed of 178 members. Originally created in 1993 during the reconstruction of Russia's legislative branch, the Council had two deputies assigned from each of Russia's 89 regions: one deputy represented the executive of that region and one deputy represented the legislature. Until legal changes in 1995, the central authorities appointed representatives of the Federation Council. Yeltsin and his executive team appointed regional governors early on, and some governors sat in the Federation Council as regional representatives. At other times, the central government would simply appoint the representatives. Yet in other regions, the central authorities would propose a list of candidates for election; some regions were able to send candidates who had managed to gather the requisite number of signatures on the electoral petition and run a successful campaign. Legal changes in December 1995 altered the composition of the Federation Council by stipulating that the two representatives of each region would definitely be that region's governor and legislative speaker. The December 1995 law also mandated that gubernatorial elections were to be held in all regions by the end of 1996. Hence, Federation Council members were to be elected indirectly, that is, they entered the Federation Council on account of being elected to necessary positions.

The Federation Council appoints judges to the three top courts, decides on the use of the armed forces, approves border changes for intra-Russian subjects (e.g., oblasts), calls presidential elections, approves of a presidential introduction of martial law, impeaches the president, and appoints or removes from office the prosecutor-general and the deputy chairman of the accounting chamber. Furthermore, legislation adopted by the State Duma is passed on to the Federation Council after five days; within 14 days the Federation Council may adopt or reject the legislation. If the Council has not considered the legislation within the first 14 days after its introduction in this upper legislative chamber, the legislation is considered passed and legally binding.

The State Duma is composed of 450 members, chosen through individual and party-based balloting. The powers of the Duma are those typical for a representative body. Most important is the right of the Duma to pass legislation. The Duma has responsibility for approving the state budget; unlike most

legislation, the budget must be approved *three* separate times by majority vote. The Duma approves the appointment of ministers and the head of the Central Bank. The Duma, through its various committees, enjoys the power of political investigation and can recommend policy and laws based on the findings of these committees.

The Duma is more of a representative body than the Federation Council. According to the constitution, Duma elections are to occur every four years. Half of the Duma is chosen through elections for individual candidates from Russia's various regions, where the number of positions is based on population (as for the U.S. House of Representatives). These individual races are "first-past-the-post"—the winner is the candidate with the most votes, regardless of whether the number is a majority or plurality. The other 225 seats are apportioned in a more complex system, reserved for balloting based on a party list. Voters throughout the country cast a vote for a political party. Those parties that garner 5 percent or more of the total votes cast are eligible to receive some of these 225 seats. The number of seats they receive is equal to the percentage of the votes cast for those parties that overcame the 5 percent barrier.

The overall powers of the legislature were limited after the conflicts of 1993. The executive-legislature balance is lopsided; the president's position above politics and thus outside of political procedure deprives the legislature of checks and therefore of much autonomy, especially if the president decides to dissolve parliament. Furthermore, the Federation Council was docile in its early years because the president, who could appoint whomever he wanted, appointed its members. Since 1995 the law requires that governors be elected; because governors allied with Yeltsin and the "parties of power" have not fared well in provincial elections, the Federation Council has the chance to escape the president's control.

However, the legislature does have certain powers that can be used against the executive as a check. The Duma has the right to initiate impeachment, and the Federation Council the duty to decide on whether impeachment will go through. In addition, the Duma may use a vote of no confidence against the prime minister and his government; this is, however, a double-edged sword that can lead to the Duma's dissolution. Hence, the check that the legislature wields itself contains a check wielded by the president.

One key type of power and political process, controlled by parliament, is that of introducing nationwide legislation. This process is somewhat complicated. Leg-



islation is first introduced in the Duma by legislators or executive members (such as the president or prime minister), where it must pass two separate votes (and sometimes three, as for the federal budget). If the bill passes the second or third reading, then in up to five days it goes to the Federation Council. If the Federation Council accepts the bill or does not consider it within a 14-day period, the bill is considered approved and goes to the president for his consideration and signature. If the Federation Council rejects the bill, it returns to the Duma. If a two-thirds majority continues to support the bill, the Federation Council's rejection is waived; if the two-thirds majority is not reached, a "conciliation committee" is set up to find compromise revisions that would allow the bill to pass both the lower and the upper houses.

If the president signs the bill, it becomes law or policy. If the president rejects it, then the bill returns to the Duma, where it may be dropped or reconsidered, and the legislative process begins anew. However, a two-thirds majority in both houses may choose to override the president's veto. In this case, the president must either sign the bill or defy parliament's power. This, of course, could lead to conflict between the executive and legislative branches and possibly result in dissolution of parliament.

Parliament is not a rubber-stamp organization for executive power, even though executive power is extensive. As discussed above, parliament has the power of impeachment and no confidence, and it maintains control over the budget. Stronger yet is the open political space for debate and for controlling political rhetoric, which, coupled with a free and often critical media, gives parliament additional power and a degree of independence for opposing the executive and shaping the political agenda. However, these institutional tools exist only for a parliament with the will and the opportunity to use them.

In the 1993–95 period of elections, Yegor Gaidar's "Russia's Democratic Choice" came in second on the party ballot in 1993 but had the largest number of seats, owing to the strength of candidates in individual (nonparty list) elections. By 1995 Gaidar and his party suffered the wrath of the electorate, just barely failing to overcome the 5 percent barrier in the 1995 voting; only individual candidates survived to carry the Russia's Choice banner into the 1996 Duma.

Grigorii Yavlinskii promised an alternative reform party, but his party, Yabloko, could not improve on its base in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Partly this was because Yabloko did not move beyond the position of

opposition to the government; in addition, Yavlinskii's Jewish roots and (however unfair) arrogant image did not help his party's fortunes. The heirs to Russia's Choice, Union of Right Forces, also inherited popular wrath against perceived corrupt market reforms—and, as for Yabloko, the leaders of Union of Right Forces (Boris Nemtsov, Irina Khakamada) were not among the more popular in the country. In the reform camp, Our Home Is Russia was organized as a party of power to support the president, but it never gained momentum. In 1995 the Congress of Russian Communities looked to be a nationalist competitor to the Liberal Democrats, helped by the leadership of popular general Aleksandr Lebed. However, this party did not overcome the 5 percent barrier in 1995.

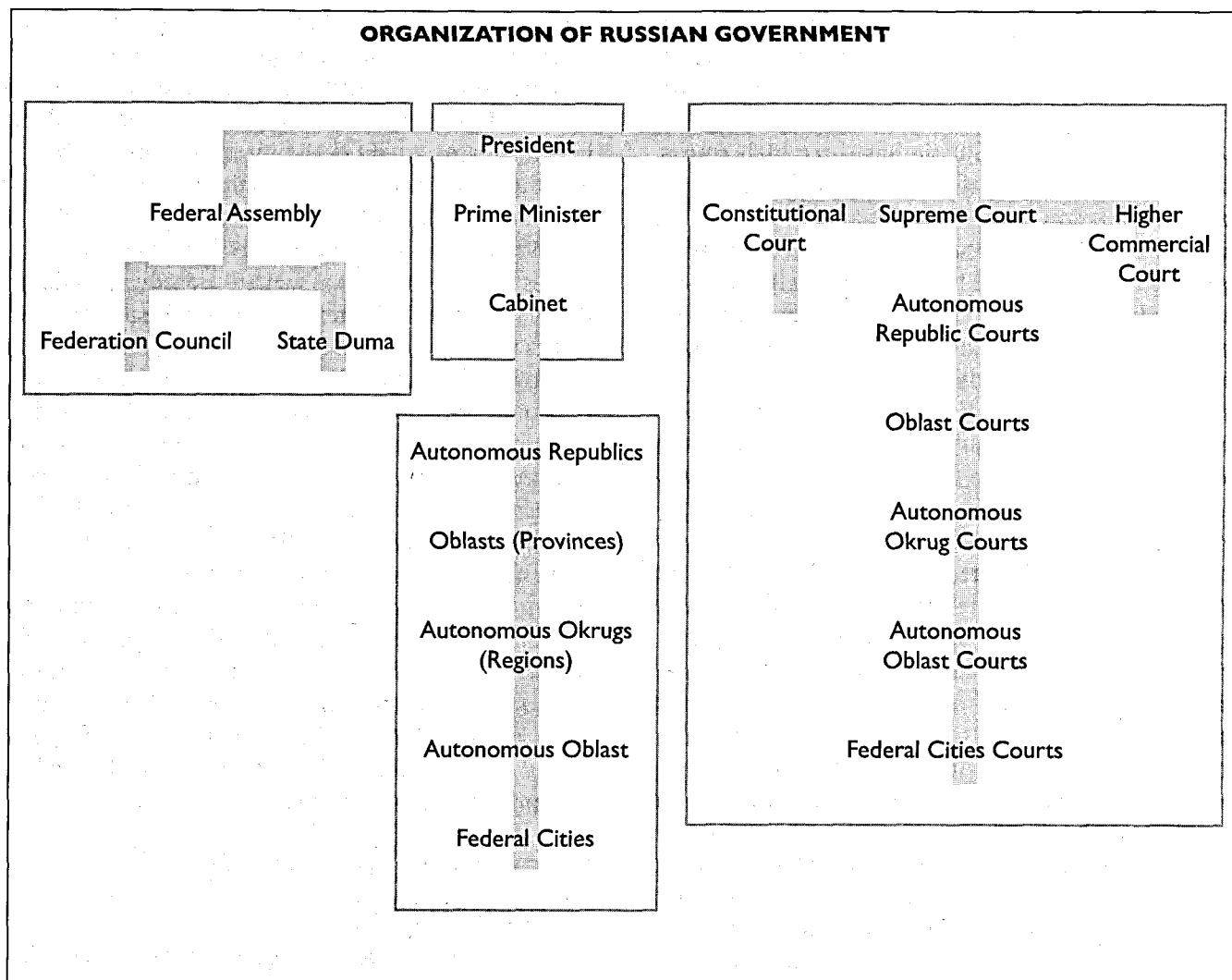
In 1995 right-wing pro-market parties were on the decline, and the Communists emerged triumphant. They looked poised to gain even more ground in 1998, as the ruble crash effectively ended Yeltsin's ability to govern Russia. Iurii Luzhkov's potential juggernaut was derailed by Putin and his Unity Party in 1999, and in 2003 Putin achieved domination of the Duma through United Russia.

#### ELECTIONS TO THE STATE DUMA, DECEMBER 7, 2003

| Party                                     | % votes | Seats |
|---|---------|-------|
| United Russia                             | 37.6%   | 222   |
| Communist Party of the Russian Federation | 12.6%   | 51    |
| Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia        | 11.5%   | 36    |
| Motherland—People's Patriotic Union       | 9%      | 37    |
| Yabloko                                   | 4.3%    | 4     |
| Union of Right Forces                     | 4%      | 3     |
| Agrarian Party of Russia                  | 3.6%    | 3     |
| People's Party of the Russian Federation  | 1.2%    | 16    |
| Other (individual races)                  |         | 67    |
| Non-partisan                              |         | 11    |

*Note: Seats are based on party list percentage (over the 5% barrier) and individual races.*

*Source: [www.electionworld.org](http://www.electionworld.org)*



## JUDICIARY

Like the American system of power, Russia's political system includes a third independent branch of government, the judiciary. While legislation and conflict have helped define the powers and structures of the first two branches, the third branch receives the least attention and, arguably, is the least developed and wields the least power of all three. While in theory independent, the judiciary finds itself under several constraints. At the uppermost level, the judiciary tends to follow the overall line of the executive, either agreeing with executive decisions or declining to rule on challenges made against executive power. At lower levels, judges are hampered by insufficient resources to handle a backlog of cases and by weak institutional means of enforcement of court decisions.

Further, one important constraint is the Soviet judicial legacy. Under the Soviet system, the judiciary

was an arm of the state that, according to the tradition of civil law, applied the legal code in individual cases. The judiciary was under the strong influence of the Procuracy (office of the prosecutor), and the tradition of a dialectical examination in the court (where both prosecution and defense teams examine witnesses and evidence before an impartial jury) was foreign. Even today Russia follows the continental system of law rather than the Anglo-American common law system. In such a system, judges essentially act as interpreters of laws in the case of conflicts; because precedent does not play a formal role, conflicts must be argued anew each time they are brought up (although lawyers are known to copy the logic of successful arguments). Thus, the judiciary, especially at the local level, acts more as an interpretive arm of the bureaucracy, rather than as a branch of power that (with the power of precedent) can alter the meaning and mechanisms of legislation.

Finally, the Russian legal system awaits its own central charismatic figure able to use existing levers of power and rhetoric to carve out for the judicial system its own niche and authority.

At the highest level, Russia has three high courts. First is the Constitutional Court, for deciding issues related to violation of constitutional provisions. This court, which has 19 judges, decides whether legislation or presidential actions are in accordance with the constitution. Judges are recommended to the Federation Council, which then debates candidates and appoints (or denies) them. Already the Constitutional Court has heard several cases, the most important to date being the complaint about abuse of executive power in the president's ordering the invasion of Chechnya without prior consultation with or approval of parliament. In this case, the Constitutional Court managed to avoid criticizing the president by claiming that the action was in line with the constitution and that such a question of policy was outside the Court's competence. The Constitutional Court tends to put off difficult decisions on the basis of the Court's incompetence in dealing with particulars of cases.

At the top of the criminal court system is the second high court, the Supreme Court. Complaints against abuses by the state or against civil rights violations or criminal appeals may be carried through the tiers of the court system to this apex. The Supreme Court, as for the judicial system in general, has been undergoing changes, and procedures remain somewhat confusing. At present, the Supreme Court is staffed by 20 justices and 45 assessors. The Supreme Court is divided into three chambers, for civil, military, and criminal cases. Typically, three judges or one judge and two assessors hear and decide on cases.

The third high court is the Higher Commercial Court (or Supreme Court of Arbitration), for resolving economic disputes (especially contract disputes). This court is staffed by 70 individual justices whose work is organized into four subject areas: economic disputes, economic administration problems, review of decisions of lower arbitration courts that have legally binding force, and review of lower courts' decisions that have not gained legally binding force. Arbitration courts seldom use a jury system; instead, litigants (or their representatives) appear before one or several judges, who then apply relevant laws and decrees to decide. In addition to lower levels of normal arbitration courts there are special arbitration courts (*treteiskie*) that are organized along functional lines. Different arbitration courts include the interbank arbitration court, the arbitration commission of the Moscow interbank currency exchange, the

interbank financial arbitration court (a nonstate court concerned with banking disputes), and the maritime arbitration court of the chamber of commerce of the Russian Federation. Such courts are specialized and in many cases (such as the interbank court) are only binding on a voluntary basis; appeals or challenges of decisions may go to the regular arbitration courts.

While courts have the power of review, their powers are restricted in three ways. First, procedures and regulatory laws have been in flux, making the powers of the courts and procedures of appeal uncertain. Second, the lack of professional lawyers and judges has weakened the court system by depriving it of those actors whose expertise is needed for the courts themselves to function. Also, actors in the political and economic realms still have not acclimated to a rule of law, in which the courts would resolve conflicts. Instead, they turn to such mechanisms as enforcement through the mafia or through use of the police without following those general procedures for defending the life and liberty of the accused. Sometimes offended parties will not use the court system because they see it as useless and a waste of time. Finally, when courts do reach decisions, *formal* enforcement mechanisms grounded in legal and civil procedures are lacking.

## REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As on the national level, government at the local level is split between the three branches. A governor heads each oblast, each republic, the Moscow region, and the St. Petersburg region. Initially governors were appointed from Moscow, but in 1996 and 1997 they were subject to direct election. However, Putin took back the power to appoint governors for the executive in 2004. Municipal and oblast legislatures are unicameral bodies, with the power to pass budgets, adopt legislation, and act as a check over the power of the local executive.

A serious political matter of the transitional period has been the conflict over control between the central and regional governments. While Russia is by name a "federation," in practice the central administration has tried to bind the powers of regional governors and bodies in economic and political decisions. For example, central authorities control the distribution of funds and privatization decisions, over the objections of local bodies who claim that regional expertise makes them better judges. In addition, privatization and elections have given local elites greater leverage vis-à-vis the center, and this often leads to disagreement and conflict. Federal agencies often want to sell off controlling pack-

ets of shares to single (usually Moscow-based) owners, whereas local elites and managers want increased local control over firms.

Most governors straddle the line between reformist and strong managerial policies—trying to attract investment and reform economies, on the one hand, and creating order and solidifying power, on the other. The majority of governors seem loyal to the central government, but within constraints, because the central administration punishes regional leaders for unpopular actions by ignoring regions when distributing resources or by trying to intrude on local decision making.

Crucial to conflict between the center and regions is that there are no formal institutionalized demarcations of power or rules for resolving conflicting interests and goals. The separation of powers between region and center is not clarified in the constitution; neither is there judicial power or judicial precedent for defining what powers each side has and how use of powers is related. Hence, center-region conflict will be a defining trait of Russian politics until, by rules or by force, the issue of demarcation and process is decided.

## The Electoral System

According to law, the president's term is for five years, and thus elections are to be held every five years. However, whether this political practice has become regular and institutionalized is not clear. While Yeltsin did call the 1996 election (by legal requirement), the reality is that law does not have the same moral force as in the West. Until the last minute in 1996, observers were not sure whether the election would actually be held, given that Yeltsin could cancel it at the last minute (as he dissolved the Supreme Soviet in 1993). In 1996 democracy was not truly tested, since the officeholder (Yeltsin) won reelection and did not have to vacate his position. In short, the official version of the electoral system and procedure hinges on fragile agreements to play by the rules rather than on strong convictions and beliefs that "this is how the system always has worked and will work," rooted in decades of actual repeated practice.

A candidate must secure 1 million signatures supporting his candidacy before being allowed officially on the ballot. Once on the ballot, all candidates campaign until the last days before the elections, when political advertisements (and publication of opinion poll information) are forbidden. The two candidates with the highest vote totals continue to a second round of voting. In the

second round, a winner is declared only if he receives a majority of votes. Voters have an option of voting against all candidates.

## The Party System

From the rise of the first independent party (Pamiat') in 1988, political parties have come to form the backbone of post-Soviet political life. Since 1991 elections have served as an incentive for party formation; many parties change or disappear soon after the relevant election, from lack of success or splits. The types of parties vary from the Communist Party to more radical (left-wing) Communists-Workers' Russia, from the short-lived seminationalist Congress of Russian Communities to the more controversial and nationalist Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (Zhirinovskii's party), from the monetarist reformers of Gaidar's Russia's Choice to Yavlinskii's neo-Keynesianist Yabloko, to the Beer-Lovers' Party (whose charter proclaimed democratically that "each person has the right to drink or not to drink"). Parties adhere to particular ideologies and try to appeal to those citizens who would be in the same camp. However, parties still have not developed entirely; party congresses are irregular and filled usually by the most dedicated or ambitious. With the exception of the Communist Party—the inheritor of a large following and tradition of congresses and organization—most parties are more alliances of individuals under a single tent. (Duma rules allow party members to break from their parties and enter different fractions after elections have been held and membership in the Duma determined.)

Defining whether a party or groups of parties are "left," "right," "centrist," and so on is rather confusing, especially since market reforms are both "right-wing" (pro-market and libertarian) and "liberal" (since they challenge the status quo), while "conservative" parties (against change) are "leftist" in that they support a strong state role in the economy and society. Most parties have come to be defined in terms of attitude toward economic policy and reforms (in particular, toward the role of the state). This leads to three groups: reformers (dedicated to continuing reforms, even radical pro-market reforms), centrists (concerned with pragmatic economic reform), and antimarket parties (who oppose economic reforms in their current guise). Finally, one will note that much discussion of these parties is in terms of economic policy: given the centrality of Russia's market transition and its effects on the everyday lives of ordinary Russians (more

than Russia's transition to democracy), economic and related social platforms tend to be the most developed and strongest parts of parties' rhetoric; politics usually enters a party's campaign as appeals to nationalism.

In the early 1990s reformist parties dominated, riding on support for market reform, Yeltsin's popularity, and positive opinion about the end of the Soviet Union. However, market reforms hurt many in the population and also gave birth to "New Russians" (rich entrepreneurs who made money off of speculative activities and flashed their wealth) and "oligarchs," super-rich Russians who used political connections to gain control of lucrative natural-resource firms. Support for reformists remained, but only among entrepreneurial, educated, and urban segments of the population. Beyond this, support shifted to the Communists and nationalist parties as protest votes or out of nostalgia for the Socialist welfare state and Russian geopolitical power and prestige. The second half of the 1990s constituted a standoff between Communists, dominating the Duma, and Yeltsin and his allies (some reformers, some opportunists). With the emergence of Putin, the centrist juggernaut United Russia has come to dominate the political scene to the detriment of right-wing and left-wing parties. This move to the center is less a sign of emerging political moderation among the population—nationalist pride persists, as does some desire for welfare support—than it is a sign of the increasing power of the Kremlin and Putin's technocratic, less ideological stance. (Yeltsin hoped to do the same with his "party of power," Our Home Is Russia. However, this party was led by the uncharismatic prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Yeltsin also did not use such political tools as *kompromat* to hurt competing parties and support his vehicle for legislative control.) Thus, one should not mistake the move of Russian politics toward the center as a sign of moderation; rather, this centrism reflects the weakening importance of ideology to the real dynamics of Russian politics and its replacement with practical power politics and technocratic, rather than ideological, solutions to issues of economic and social development.

## Major Political Parties

### UNITED RUSSIA

(Edinaia Rossiia)

In 2004, for the first time in Russia's post-Soviet history, a party other than the Communists was the

largest in the Duma: with 222 out of 450 seats in the lower house, United Russia was now the true legislative power. This party was born as Unity (Edinstvo), formed only a few months before the 1999 Duma elections, but on Putin's coattails and led by the efficient Minister of Civil Defense Sergei Shoigu, the party managed to gain 72 seats to become the second largest party in the lower house. Unity was driven less by an overarching ideology than manufactured support for Putin, and it included a host of different celebrities and national and regional political elites. Unity was also created as a vehicle for Putin to have influence within the Duma and to compete effectively against the threat from Iurii Luzhkov and Evgenii Primakov, the Fatherland—Our Russia alliance. By 2001 Putin and Luzhkov had reached an accord, and they merged their parties to form a super party, United Russia (originally called "The Union 'Unity' and Fatherland"). Their program placed United Russia in the center of the political spectrum. The basic demands of the party's program include a strong executive branch to bring political order; improved state efficiency and integrity; increased accountability of politicians; expanded civil society via strengthened political parties and their control over the state; defenses of civil rights and justice (vaguely understood); stimulation of economic development through reduced bureaucratic interference; rationalization of the tax system and continued structural reforms, especially in the financial system; and development of regional autonomy and of scientific and cultural work. United Russia's program is sufficiently vague and contains the required buzzwords ("development," "civil rights," and the like) to legitimate a wide range of reforms that Putin could push through, from increasing presidential control over parliamentary candidates to reforming welfare (e.g., lowering subsidies for household needs such as gas and electricity). In its call for a strong state, United Russia appears to support state-led development akin to that in East Asia, rather than the more laissez-faire economy of the Anglo-American world and assumed in the neoliberalism of Yegor Gaidar and the Union of Right Forces (see below).

In September 2004, in response to Putin's calls to increase centralization of power around the executive (to combat terrorism and corruption), United Russia began to expand its organizational bases in the regions, becoming a second arm of the "presidential vertical" stemming from the Kremlin.

## COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

(Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossiiskoi  
Federatsii; KPRF)

Until the 21st century the KPRF was the largest party in the Duma, representing older citizens nostalgic or desperate for the security of the command economy and Soviet welfare or nationalist citizens who could not stomach the Liberal Democrats or felt there was no nationalist alternative to KPRF. Unlike similar parties in Eastern Europe, Russia's Communists have not tried to reform their image and turn the party into modern social democrats. Rather, they have been forced to maintain a symbolic link with the Soviet Communist Party to maintain the loyalty of the 20 percent of the Russian electorate who support them. This has created a dilemma and constraint for the Communists: change and they lose loyal support that makes up part of the electorate (but is dying out as this generation passes from the scene); do not change, and the Communists appear more anachronistic and less a serious contender for political power.

KPRF has a leftist, pro-welfare policy line. They stood opposed to privatization of industrial enterprises but did not fight that policy. They were more ardent against privatization of land, and Yeltsin had difficulties with such laws in the Communist-led Duma. Only in 2001 did Putin manage to pass privatization of land (which remains problematic). KPRF has called for social spending on welfare, subsidies for state-run industry and agriculture (i.e., collective farms, the *kolkhoz*), and provision of good pensions and free education. They have occasionally toyed with ideas of renationalization of certain firms and price controls, although these have been marginal ideas. KPRF has been critical of the war in Chechnya, although they also have a nationality tint in being critical of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and supportive of Russian geopolitical ambitions.

Perennial presidential candidate and party leader Gennady Zyuganov could not expand his appeal beyond traditional Communist voters because of his lackluster image; 2004 candidate Nikolai Charitonov cut an even less impressive figure. If they are to survive, the Communists will have to "modernize" their image, although at present there is no sign of vibrant leaders waiting in the wings to make this happen.

## LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF RUSSIA

(Liberal'no-Demokraticeskaya Partiya  
Rossii; LDPR)

LDPR stormed onto the political stage in 1993 as a nationalist protest vote against Communists and right-wing pro-reform parties. Led by the charismatic and sometimes nonsensical Vladimir Zhirinovskii, LDPR appealed to working-class nationalists stung by market reforms and Russia's loss of geopolitical prestige. Originally little known and then not taken seriously, a major investment in television advertising propelled LDPR to a shocking and unexpected electoral success in 1993. However, Zhirinovskii's bravado and antics lost him support, and LDPR's support halved by the 1995 elections—although most pundits expected LDPR would barely pass the 5 percent barrier, if at all. LDPR appeared to be losing popularity through the 1990s, winning fewer seats in the 1995 and 1999 Duma elections. However, siding with Putin and tapping into the smoldering anger by 2000, LDPR gained renewed electoral popularity in 2003.

LDPR's political program is not among the more specific, except as a vehicle for promoting Zhirinovskii. The general thrust is expanded state power and national prestige, including a more aggressive foreign policy, increased border controls to combat crime, and increased spending on the armed forces and social programs. Early statements by Zhirinovskii and LDPR elite were often xenophobic and bordered on the anti-Semitic, and Zhirinovskii blamed Jews and the United States (the CIA) for perestroika and the destruction of Soviet power. However, in the later 1990s Zhirinovskii toned down his rhetoric, and he jumped on Putin's bandwagon early, supporting the president's efforts to increase security and order, to clamp down on the Chechen rebellion, and to improve Russia's position vis-à-vis the West.

## MOTHERLAND—PEOPLE'S PATRIOTIC UNION

(Rodina—Narodno-Patrioticheskii Soyuz)

Rodina combines two important streams of contemporary political ideology: moderate leftism (but short of Soviet Communism) and nationalism, expressed through the development of the regions, which have been mostly ignored by political parties that focus their attention on the Duma and Moscow politics. Founded in 1998 and originally called "Party of Russian Regions,"

Motherland now claims 5,000 members and representation in 47 regions. It sees the biggest issue facing Russia as the creation of a strong state that can guard the well-being of its people, and this can be done through democracy and moral improvement. It also claims to be a patriotic party, in that it holds that it is important not only to defend the Russian motherland but also to celebrate its heroic traditions and history. Motherland supports basic welfare in the regions and increased aid to children. It contends that this can be realized only by giving greater political power to the regions, rather than leaving decision making in Moscow alone.

## UNION OF RIGHT FORCES

### (Soyuz Pravykh Sil)

The demise of this party spells the symbolic end of original post-Soviet economic and political reform. In the 1993 elections Yegor Gaidar, architect of Yeltsin's initial reforms (e.g., price liberalization) in 1992–93, formed Russia's Choice (Vybor Rossii) as a vehicle for the reform movement. Yeltsin did not endorse this party, and Russia's Choice became a target for popular disaffection over the pain of reforms: voters often voted specifically *against* Gaidar's party (e.g., for the Communists or LDPR). Russia's Choice gained places in the Duma, although fewer than it had hoped. In 1995 the party was renamed Russia's Democratic Choice (Demokraticeskii Vybor Rossii) but gained even fewer seats. By 1999 Gaidar's light had faded and his party was defunct. The Union of Right Forces was set up as its heir, the new vehicle for pro-market, pro-democracy reforms and reformers—Anatolii Chubais, Boris Nemtsov, Irina Khakamada, and others from Yeltsin's pre-1998 cabinets—and smaller pro-market parties that had little chance of representation. With Putin's support, Union of Right Forces gained 29 seats in the Duma in 1999. However, Putin's own real vehicle, Unity (later renamed United Russia), became the real party of Putin's reforms, and in 2003 the Union of Right Forces gained only 4 percent of the votes and had to rely on individual races to gain three seats in the Duma. In contrast to United Russia's supremacy, the symbolism of the moment was not lost: Putin and a new political era had opened and the curtain had dropped (for the time being) on the ideology that had led Russia out of its Soviet shadow.

## YABLOKO

Yabloko was once a liberal opposition in the Duma and the major alternative to politicians linked to Yeltsin. However, Yabloko's fortunes have soured since Putin's

arrival, and in 2003 the party failed to overcome the 5 percent electoral barrier. Formed by Grigorii Yavlinski and allies, Yabloko began as a movement in 1993 and became a party by 1997. Yabloko has championed market and democratic reforms; however, its backers are more neo-Keynesianist and less enamored with radical shock therapy and the fiscal and privatization policies pursued by Yeltsin and his former advisers (e.g., Gaidar, Chubais). Yabloko has also been critical of Russian foreign policy, the war in Chechnya, and Putin's attempts to centralize power.

## Minor Political Parties

Russia's political landscape is scattered with many small left-wing parties, from the more radically Communist National Bolshevik Party and Revolutionary Workers' Party to the more moderate Social Democratic Party of the Russian Federation and Liberal Russia. The Agrarian Party enjoyed a larger representation in the Duma before 1999, but since 1999 it has had to rely on individual races for its meager representation. The Agrarian Party was founded in 1993 as a vehicle for the interests of state farms and collective farms and to pressure the government to continue agricultural subsidies and protectionism. With 250,000 members and more than 3,000 branches in the regions, the Agrarian Party is among Russia's better-organized groups. Despite its relatively stronger grass roots, this party's power in the center is waning. The People's Party of the Russian Federation, a social-democratic party, gained 16 seats in 2003 through individual races. Toward the middle of the political spectrum, Women of Russia had a handful of seats in the 1990s, and the party drew attention to the plight of women, demanding better welfare services, and voicing criticism of the Chechen conflict. On the right, Forward Russia was founded by radical pro-market reformer Boris Fëdorov as a platform for his brand of reform policies.

## Other Political Forces

Corruption of the rule of law, the lack of institutionalization of the rules of power, and the military are three vital issues that still threaten Russia's political stability.

The links among the mafia, corrupt bureaucrats, former red directors (Soviet-era managers of state enterprises), and private bankers have helped drain capital away from the Russian people and into the pockets of a select few who have the connections to those in power.

Further, this new elite has not been good at hiding its wealth and power, leading to growing disillusionment with market reforms and growing disgust with state officials and politicians. The visibility of the new power elite's influence was evident in the events of August 1998. Putin has put the oligarchs in their place, but perhaps at the price of democratic freedoms.

Organized crime and official corruption are only the most visible parts of a larger problem: creating the rule of law in Russia. Not only mafia bosses and high-placed bureaucrats skirt the letter and spirit of laws; average bureaucrats, businessmen, and citizens do so as well, either because others are doing it and force them to or because others are doing it and they do not want to lose out. From bribes paid to bank workers to policemen stopping cars on the street just to demand a fine (which often ends up in the policemen's pockets), Russian life is not so much structured by the rule of law as by avoidance of rules and laws. This raises the costs of doing business—and thus has scared off much foreign investment—and raises issues of justice; such problems play into the hands of authoritarian politicians who see a solution to corruption not through inculcating a culture of laws but through using the iron fist of repression.

Rules of power between the center and regions remain in flux. Here the conflict between the federal government and regional governments over sovereignty has not abated as local officials do not always share the views and policies emanating from Moscow. The lack of democratic traditions in center-regional relations has made center-region issues (such as taxes and investment) points of contention. Putin's use of *kompromat* brought some regional governors back into line. His reintroduction of presidential appointment of governors has solved the problem of center-region conflict but at the cost of local autonomy.

Finally, Russia's army is one of conscripts, and recent changes have tightened the loopholes through which many 17-year-old boys evaded the dreaded service. Officer and soldier alike are underpaid (or unpaid for long stretches). Officers' quarters are scant and privileges shrinking. The prestige of service is at an all-time low. Soldiers are poorly trained, and their military lives are miserable—any footage of army life in Chechnya, with soldiers confused from the fighting, often disorganized, and with few, poor-quality provisions (and sometimes without provisions), certainly testifies to why morale is so low and anger so high in the military. (Morale and material conditions were so bad that experts believe they accounted for the 500 suicides, by officers, in 1996 alone.) Finally, soldiers are subject to abuse (physical, mental, sexual) from other soldiers

and from officers, leading to a large number of AWOL cases and even injuries and deaths. Before they were dismissed from the administration, Lebed and then various members of the armed forces warned that the army was on the brink of rebellion. Without an injection of "professionalism" and money, Russia's armed forces, especially its army, will continue to deteriorate; the result may be military rebellion or simply a refusal to fight when called on by those in command—unless the commander is a popular figure such as Lebed.

## National Prospects

Nikolai Gogol's famous quip "Russia, whither thou flyest?" is as pertinent today as it was 150 years ago. Russian voters rejected a return to the past in July 1996; however, just what from the past they rejected is unclear. A vote for Yeltsin, then, was not support for economic reform or an endorsement of Yeltsin's tenure as president but rather a decision to avoid repeating the political terror that accompanied Communist rule.

Russia's economy remains problematic. Oil income has aided economic growth since 2000, but it is unclear whether this is leading to real structural reform and laying the foundation for vibrant capitalism. Too many firms survive in a shadow economy of barter and tax evasion. Laws remain too confused and convoluted, and corruption and incompetence among state officials remains rampant. The banking sector requires further reform, and in the summer of 2004 there was a mini-crisis among several major Russian banks. Not that Russia's economy is a total doom-and-gloom scenario. Small private firms have sprouted, absorbing workers unemployed or underemployed and providing better wages paid on time. Russia's natural resources hold vast potential for income; with oil and mineral-extraction firms in their financial-industrial groups, banks may be able to bring in the funds for restructuring and retooling that will help Russia's economy rebound. However, the complete transition to the market—meaning new institutions, new organizational structures, and new economic practices and culture—will take at least 10 years, if not longer.

Russia's political system continues to take shape. While he created the oligarchs, who were willing to undercut democracy through shady deals, Boris Yeltsin still followed the rules and trappings of democracy. Perhaps his biggest failure as a democrat was picking a successor to defend his interests rather than let the electorate decide his successor in fair elections. Yeltsin's strategy was to trade support for power: Duma represen-



tatives and regional governors had their perks and ran their own bailiwicks in exchange for supporting Yeltsin's right to rule. As a result, the central government could not always enforce its own laws in the small empires of local elites. Putin's attempts to centralize power might be the start of real improvement in the struggle for order, stability, and the reduction of corruption and crime—but this type of technocratic solution often hinders prospects for democratic development. The last four years have seen freedom traded for order, and it is uncertain whether Russia will go the way of post-Socialist countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic, toward democracy and inclusion in the West, or in the direction of Belarus and Ukraine, toward authoritarianism and centralized political control.

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