

Democracy, federalism and representation: Russian elections in retrospect

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Sergei Medvedev

**Democracy, Federalism and
Representation:**

Russian elections in retrospect

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Osteuropa-Institut

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1 INTRODUCTION: THE TWIN PEAKS OF RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY	5
2 ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY	6
2.1 Per aspera ad electio	6
2.2 A democratic society?	7
2.3 A democratic regime?	9
2.4 A democratic ideology?	12
2.5 Russia's "imitation democracy"	13
3 ELECTIONS AND FEDERALISM	14
3.1 A democratic mandate	14
3.2 The two-party game	15
3.3 A victory for the "third force"	16
3.4 The new role of the Federation Council	18
3.5 The new center-periphery relationship	21
4 CONCLUSION: DEMOCRACY AS VICTIM TO GEOGRAPHY	22
5 BIBLIOGRAPHY	26
Appendix A	
Appendix B	

1 Introduction: The Twin Peaks of Russian democracy

Russia's democracy is in its juvenility (indeed, some would say infancy). However, it can already boast a good electoral record. A four-year election cycle has been established, during which federal and local bodies of the legislative (the State Duma and regional Assemblies), and the executive (the President of Russia and regional governors) are being re-elected. The country is currently in the mid-way between the two peaks of this cycle—the 1995-96 apex, and the one of 1999-2000. Staying right in the middle is a good point to observe the phenomenon of postcommunist elections in Russia, before we are overwhelmed by the approaching Duma elections in December 1999, and the presidential elections in June 2000, especially given that the latter campaign has already started, as signaled by Boris Yeltsin's moves in the spring of 1998 (replacement of the Government and the resignation of Victor Chernomyrdin as his possible challenger in 2000).

The following paper attempts to analyze the 1995-96 peak of the electoral cycle (elections to the State Duma in December 1995, presidential elections in June-July 1996, and gubernatorial elections in almost fifty of Russia's regions in September-December 1996) with two particular questions in mind. The first question is to what extent procedural achievements (i.e. elections as a new form of legitimacy in Russia) attest to representative democracy, i.e. representation of the population in institutions and decision-making. The second question is whether the federal and regional elections contribute to federalization of the Center-Periphery relations in Russia, instilling certain rules into the heretofore disorderly game of Russia's regionalization.

To put it simply, there are two big topics to address:

1. elections and democracy,
2. elections and federalism.

The two main parts of this paper attempt to answer these questions. Part 1, concentrating primarily on the 1996 presidential elections, recognizes the fact that those were a victory of the democratic procedure over inherent post-Soviet fears of anarchy and Communist *revanche*, and temptations of authoritarianism. However, the question remains whether a democratic electoral procedure have roots and reference in the modern Russian *society*, the current *regime* and the ruling *ideology*.

Part 2, on the other side, focuses on the 1996-97 regional elections in Russia, taking a closer look at the regional winners of the electoral marathon, their relationship to the Kremlin and the "party of the authority", as well as their role in the Federation Council and the entire edifice of the Center-Periphery relations.

At the end of the day, analysis in both chapters boils down to the question of representation as the ontological basis of any democracy. Firstly, this is the representation of masses in the

political process, and secondly, the representation of territories. The Conclusion, therefore, makes a comparison between these two kinds of representation.¹

2 Elections and democracy

The 1996 presidential elections were a major accomplishment for democracy in Russia. To appreciate more thoroughly of the value of this achievement, one has to go back only ten years to when Mikhail Gorbachev's announcement of "alternative elections" (that is, elections with more than one candidacy) to the CPSU and Soviet bodies seemed a staggering innovation in a country used to a single candidate and unanimous vote. Since then, the USSR and Russia have had a dozen national, and dozens of regional and local election campaigns (including referendums). Elections are no longer a symbolic and cultural predicament; they have become a psychological, political and technological routine.² In only a decade, a new form of legitimacy, totally unfamiliar to the national political culture, has been firmly established in Russia, and the political elite feels compelled to submit to the test of the ballot box.

The 1996 presidential elections further advanced this trend, setting the precedent of the first open and free elections of the head of state in Russian history.³ In a sense, they became a point of no return in the political modernization of Russia. Of course, Russia is not guaranteed against future attempts (or periods) of authoritarian rule, but from now on, any form of legitimacy other than elections is likely to be viewed as extraordinary and temporary, a deviation from the political norm.⁴

What's more, presidential elections took place despite strong anti-electoral phobias among the political elite, especially its so-called "liberal wing". Groups possessing power and property were reluctant to take election risks for fear of possible change of the status-quo, political instability, re-distribution of capital and budgetary flows, or even mass mobilization including street protests, violence, and the emergence of radical popular leaders. As formulated by *Segodnya* daily in early 1996: "You shouldn't elect a chief physician in a mental hospital", these fears resulted in a number of calls to postpone or cancel the presidential elections.

2.1 Per aspera ad electio

In April 1996, 13 leading Russian businessmen launched a statement that called on the leading contenders to reach an unspecified "compromise" without which the country risks collapsing into "civil war". Later on, one of the signatories Boris Berezovsky, then president of the powerful financial and automobile "Logovaz" group, head of the Public Russian

¹ This paper draws on two works originally contributed to Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rome. Medvedev (1997a) and Medvedev (1997b). The author is obliged to Ettore Greco and Heikki Patomäki for comments, and to Klaus Segbers for encouragement to come up with the following text.

² Fadin 1996.

³ Russian presidential campaign of 1991 fell short of a full-scale national election, since Russia then possessed of incomplete statehood, being one of the republics within the USSR.

⁴ Fadin 1996,1.

Television, and a close confidant of Mr Yeltsin and his family,⁵ reiterated that Russia's leading politicians must strike a deal before polling day because the issues at stake were too serious to be decided at the ballot box. Another Mr Yeltsin's confidant and chief bodyguard Major-General Alexander Korzhakov was, in a soldierly way, more straightforward. In early May 1996, in a highly publicized comment to the British *Observer*, he openly called for the elections to be canceled. In this judgment, he was backed by Colonel-General Leonty Kuznetsov, commander of the Moscow Military District, speaking on behalf of a number of top officers and commanders of military districts.

President Yeltsin was quick to debunk his generals' confessions, and publicly told General Korzhakov "not to meddle in politics".⁶ However, the most notable thing about these statements was the reaction of Russia's political establishment. It seemed as though an occasional remark by president's bodyguard lifted a taboo from a forbidden topic. Indeed, it was followed by an avalanche of confessions by presidential aides, analysts and public figures, letters to newspapers, and collective statements, all pleading that elections are "too risky", and a public consensus should be sought by other means, perhaps forming a coalition government, in which Communists will be responsible for some economic and all social issues.

Given this background, and an obvious temptation to call off the presidential elections, the very fact of holding them can be seen as a major accomplishment, and a triumph of the law. In a way, the 1996 presidential elections were first of all a victory of the democratic procedure, and only after that a victory of a certain personality.

The procedure has obviously worked. However, institutions alone do not attest to democracy. Although the 1996 presidential elections have improved faith into the mechanisms of public representation, the question still remains: does a democratic electoral procedure have roots and reference in the modern Russian *society*, the current *regime* and the ruling *ideology*? The following analysis seeks to answer these three questions.

2.2 A democratic society?

This problem of the grass-roots of democracy is one of the so-called "eternal questions" (*vechnye voprosy*) of the Russian self-consciousness, along with whether the country belongs to Europe, and many others. Most Russian thinkers of the last two centuries, from 19th-century Slavophiles to Nikolai Berdyaev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn observed a unique societal structure of Russia, characterized by a sort of communal identity. To put it briefly, there are two basic concepts of society, described by the German terms of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* societies are something organic and traditional, involving bonds of common sentiment, experience and identity molded together over a long period of time. *Gesellschaft* societies are contractual and constructed, in other words, results of conscious action.⁷ The Russian society has always been in the *Gemeinschaft* side of this societal

⁵ In the wake of the elections, Mr Berezovsky was given the post of Deputy Secretary of the Security Council in charge of talks with Chechnya. Since May 1998 he is the Executive Secretary of the CIS.

⁶ Gen Korzhakov was stripped of his post shortly afterwards, presumably following his other attempt to cancel elections.

⁷ Buzan 1993, 333; Jalonon 1995, 15.

spectrum: *sobornost'*, or communality, has been historically prevalent over basic structures of the civic society typical for Western Europe.

For one instance, the institution of the city is much weaker in Russia than in Europe (urbanization in Russia occurred in form rather than in content, and blocs of houses should deceive no one; cities are housing agglomerations rather than societal systems, and instead of generating civility and *Gesellschaft* links they have conserved archaic communality and *Gemeinschaft* bonds); even the institution of a *house* (i.e. a structure, as different from a *home*, or a family), of tending one's living space is underdeveloped: Russian houses have not emerged as sovereign territories, proverbial "castles", and are traditionally given less care than their European counterparts.⁸

The relative weakness of an urban culture in Russia which could nourish civil institutions, the absence of *civitas* and citizenry as socially responsible city dwellers, has resulted in a situation when a peasant breaking out of an *obshchina* (commune, or a German *Gemeinde*) and heading for the city could not be effectively socialized and was became a part of the lumpenproletariat. This situation had been reproduced after the 1917 Revolution, and especially during the collectivization/ industrialization in the 1920s and 30s: masses of peasants with their communal habits were thrown out of the village and concentrated around cities and large factories. However, there they were not socialized but rather stayed in a transitory condition between city and village, in the so-called "settlements of urban type". These settlements (in Russian, *sloboda*), with their lumpenproletariat culture, in which, according to some calculations, over 30 percent of the Soviet population dwelled, were a perfect matrix of communal, *Gemeinschaft*-type lifestyle, and still form the social backbone in most post-Soviet states, Russia included.⁹

In this sense, it was not surprising that the natural response to liberalization in late Soviet and in the modern Russian society was the recourse to *Gemeinschaft* links, not to *Gesellschaft* structures. Instead of forming interest groups and parties, articulating its interests and channeling them into public institutions, the populace in most of the country has relied on guaranteed and proven means of survival (families, friends, relatives, personal contacts in local bodies of the authority, illegal or semi-legal trades, etc.).¹⁰ Such social conditions clearly prevent the formation of democratic groundwork, and grass-roots of democratic institutions remain virtually non-existent. People may pronounce in favor of democracy (and many a poll indicate this), but living in a *Gemeinschaft*-type social environment, it is hard to develop democratic consciousness and habits.¹¹

One also has to mention the unprecedented growth of organized crime as yet another *Gemeinschaft*-type response of the post-Soviet society to liberalization. Criminal groups now controlling a major part of the country's territory are typical *Gemeinschaft*-type social

⁸ Medvedev 1998, 51.

⁹ For a concise analysis of this problem, see: Glazychev 1995.

¹⁰ By the way, this largely explains why the 1992 shock therapy and the ongoing decline in living standards have been tolerated by the population without any major social unrest and strong political protest.

¹¹ A different lifestyle is being formed in large cities, particularly in Moscow, with emerging social and public institutions similar to those in Western democracies, but it is not characteristic of the entire country.

structures (like “families” in the Sicilian Mafia),¹² and in the conditions of breakup of old societal links, these well-organized structures that take care of their members appeal to many youngsters: in fact, organized crime is emerging as a popular lifestyle.

In summary, grass-root democratization in Russia meets tremendous obstacles inherent in the structure of the society. One should not be misled by introduction of democratic procedures which up to this day function without a real feedback from the masses. In this context, analyzing the democratic transformation of Russia, instead of concentrating on democratic procedures, like the elections, and institution-building, we should rather be concerned with society-building, i.e. the emergence of interest groups and social structures at the grass-root and community level.

2.3 A democratic regime?

Applying criteria of democratization to the emerging political regime in Russia is problematic as well. To gain a better understanding of the nature of the current regime and its views on cooperation with the West, one has to compare it to the regime in power in late 1991 and 1992. That period in the wake of the August 1991 coup in Moscow was characterized by an unprecedented degree of cooperation between Russia and the West – not just political and diplomatic cooperation that was already there since the Gorbachev era, but cooperation among liberal elites on both sides. Western liberal circles, especially those related to the international financial institutions (the IMF, World Bank, EBRD, and others) had had a considerable influence on the nascent Russian liberal sectors (primarily in finance, but also in trade in commodities, and oil exports) and a major say in shaping the format of the Russian economic reform. In fact, the Russian liberal elite, as well as the entire ideology of democratization actively promoted at the period, was vitally dependent on Western financial instruments, or, as Prime Minister of the reform government Yegor Gaidar used to say, “for implementing reform, Russia has access to resources that by far exceed her domestic capacities”.¹³

The peak of this cycle of Russian domestic politics was the first quarter of 1992, when methods of shock liberalization devised with the help of Western advisers (price liberalization, privatization, etc.) were applied. Russia’s foreign and security policy more or less followed the suit: it was during these months that Russia claimed to consider NATO membership.

Although the social environment was by and large non-democratic (see above), and grass-roots of democracy still had to be developed, democracy was a prevailing ideology at the period, and there were virtually no, or very little, political obstacles to accepting Western influence. There was a certain ideal model (economic liberalism), and patented external controllers (possessing economic instruments) to supervise the country’s progress on the way towards this model.

¹² Putnam 1993.

¹³ Leontiev 1994.

However, the “Western” period turned out to be short-lived. Starting from late 1992 (replacement of Mr Gaidar as prime minister), and all through 1993, conservative counterpoises to liberalization continued to build up. The liberal consensus turned out to be too fragile, since re-distribution of the Soviet property had not yet been accomplished, and a number of elites were not yet integrated into the regime. Tension increased, and a severe crisis broke out in late September 1993. The opposition took it to the streets of Moscow, provoking a riot and street violence, and virtually capturing the city on 2 and 3 October. The next day, Mr Yeltsin moved in tanks that bombarded the White House, a seat of parliament which provided refuge for the opposition leaders.

These events started a wholly new political cycle in Russia. Quite unexpectedly, even for those in government, the use of military force to settle a political dispute dramatically increased chances for domestic stability: within a month of the bombardment of parliament, the regions which had been reluctant to comply with federal tax laws for the last two years, started paying taxes. Stabilization was further increased by the December 1993 parliamentary elections won by the nationalists and communists: the former opposition (and part of its ideology) was now incorporated into the bodies of the state authority, and thus partially neutralized. (“Domestication” of Zhirinovski is an instructive case of such evolution.) Further moves by the authorities included the Treaty on Public Accord and the amnesty in March 1994 for the organizers of the October 1993 riot.

As a result, a new regime was established by mid-1994. For the first time in post-Soviet history, it was characterized by a relative degree of stability. Principal elites which formed the backbone of the new oligarchy (most importantly, the fuel and energy complex, and the financial sector)¹⁴ have finally completed transformation and conversion of statuses characteristic of all Soviet/post-Soviet power groups:

Power in the Soviet		Access to property		Political power
political and economic environment	→	through illegal (1985-91)	→	and financial
		and legal (1992-1996)		resources under
		privatization		post-Soviet regime

Dividing elites into “chaots” and “stabilizers”,¹⁵ one has to admit that in the new regime, the total weight of “stabilizers” by far exceeds that of “chaots” (new elites specializing in risky financial operations, illegal arms transfers, etc.). What is also important, a new bourgeois class has emerged that will seek to preserve the “structures of everyday life”.

¹⁴ According to an observation made by Yakov Pappé at a seminar in Moscow in early 1995, “The former economic system was based on a union of the fuel and energy complex and the military-industrial complex. This has now been replaced by a system based on a union of the fuel and energy complex and the financial sector”.

¹⁵ Malyutin 1995, 155-160.

At the top level, there was also a propensity to political stability. The threat of political upheaval was becoming unrealistic, and this was again proved by the parliamentary elections in December 1995. They clearly showed that major political forces that had relatively stable electorates, in their ideologies, as well as methods in struggle for power, tended towards the center (the winner, the CPRF and its leader Gennadi Zyuganov, were no exception), and that radicals on both sides of the political spectrum (e.g. Victor Anpilov's die-hard Communist "Labor Russia" and Boris Fedorov's ultra-liberal movement) could only count on marginal support.

The 1996 presidential elections have further consolidated the emerging political stability. The electoral experiment united the entire country, and all branches of the authority around the fatherly authoritarian figure of "Tzar Boris". Elections were anything (open, sophisticated in terms of media and social technologies, unbelievably costly by any world standards,¹⁶ etc.) but truly pluralistic. There had not been any real opposition. Media, public opinion, leading elites, banks were unanimously supporting the incumbent President. Local bodies of the authority were turned into Mr Yeltsin's electoral headquarters receiving money and orders from Moscow, paying delayed wages and issuing credits. The Communists, too, were playing on the president's field: they were given the role of "bad boys", and were channeling and institutionalizing the public protest, while no one assumed that they could actually take office, even in the case of an electoral victory. The ironic part of this, Communists themselves feared winning the elections, and their most ardent voters never ceased to believe that Yeltsin will stay in office whatever the outcome of the elections. The entire country was playing against the specter of communism. It is no wonder that losing the elections, Communists unconditionally abided by their results.

On top of this, the regional elections of 1996 also followed the stability scenario. They have almost completely muted political preferences of new governors (many of them members of the Communist Party), all of which pledged loyalty to Moscow. The re-elected political elite was now vertically integrated. Greater stability was reached at the middle (among principal elites, including the regional level) and the top (among federal bodies of the authority) floors of the state pyramid. But this kind of stability has little to do with democracy. The linkage between the middle and top strata is of a purely *corporatist* and *oligarchic* character. Economic interests of elites are projected onto state authorities beyond any democratic procedures—these are lobbying, bribes, and kickbacks. (Once again, here is the logic of *Gemeinschaft*-type "private" links instead of legal and structured *Gesellschaft*-type ones).

In fact, corruption (or simply "buying" politicians and entire parties) has become one of the principal features of the current regime. Instead of serving the interests of the population, the state (represented by corrupt officials at all levels) engages in economic activity—not as a mediating and regulating unit, but as an active participant, since most officials, from local governors to presidential administration, the cabinet of ministers, and the Duma, have their own vested interests (Mikhail Leontiev calls this a "trading state"¹⁷). Obviously, a trading state can by no means be called democratic, since there is a barrier of the economic interests

¹⁶ Some analysts estimate the cost of 1996 presidential campaign for Russia at \$ 20 bln. See: Koshkareva 1996.

¹⁷ Leontiev 1995.

of the elites between the population and the state bodies. The political process short circuits between the middle and the top levels of the state pyramid, bypassing its basement: the common people.¹⁸

2.4 A democratic ideology?

In the meanwhile, democracy as an ideology is no longer on the political agenda. One of the principal conditions of stability has been the incorporation of the opposition discourse in the lexicon of the authority. The unifying ideology of the regime has become a moderate nationalism, but recently also something transcending nationalism: the ideas of *derzhavnost'* (aspirations of a strong state and a great power status). Although the ruling elite was initially reluctant to use this term being afraid of too openly resounding the former opposition, it was finally *derzhavnost'* that became the basic legitimization of the new Russian regime. *Derzhavnost'* can be interpreted as a call to creating a strong, paternalist and to some extent expansionist state. Rather than nationalism, this ideology is a return to a traditional Russian form of legitimacy, characteristic of the Tsarist and the Soviet periods, in which the idea of a strong state replaces that of a nation, and the state is situated above the society.¹⁹

The undemocratic and even authoritarian nature of the ideology of *derzhavnost'* is self-evident. Foreign and security policy implications of this ideology have been the assertion of Russia's national interests which are often considered to be conflicting with those of the West (e.g. in the issue of NATO enlargement, in the former Yugoslavia, etc.). The instructive example was the evolution of former foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev in 1993-1995, who sought to follow the national-interest consensus, but was still considered to be too "pro-Western", just to be replaced in the wake of the 1995 parliamentary elections by Yevgeny Primakov, a figure much more appealing to *derzhavniki*. Thus, if not overtly anti-Western, the new regime is less favorable of cooperation with the West on political and strategic issues, as compared to that in late 1991 and 1992. Equally little is left of political cooperation among liberal elites in the West and in Russia.

Above this, one can also observe an obvious disillusionment in the idea of cooperation with the West among the elites, as well as the wider populace. Was it the West, that did not live up to the challenge and devise a strategy of engaging Russia comparable to the Marshall Plan; or was it Russia herself that could not create even an acceptable, let alone favorable, normative environment for the Western investment; or was it Russia's uniqueness, *Sonderweg*, that prevented large-scale and long-term cooperation and the application of models successfully used elsewhere? The fact is, by 1994 even the most ardent advocates of systemic cooperation between Russia and the West were compelled to recognize that the West "had lost Russia",²⁰

¹⁸ An instructive example was the post-election inflow of prominent businessmen into state leadership (Chairman of ONEXIM Bank Vladimir Potanin became the First Deputy Prime Minister; Boris Berezovsky – the Deputy Secretary of the Security Council). An obvious link between business and politics was openly institutionalized.

¹⁹ Graham 1995.

²⁰ "The potential positions which the West had had in Russia after the breakup of the communist regime, disappeared one after another without being realized. In general, an opinion emerged in Russia, that its readiness to open up frontiers and the society by changing economic and political regime, to become an integral part of the modern world, was coldly received in the West, and that the only thing that the West is

or went on to say that the liberal period of 1991-93 “had ended in the defeat of the West that had almost completely missed the opportunity of a ‘soft’ integration of Russia into the Western world and placed the political forces in Russia, that had been counting on the Western perspective, in the position of political outsiders”.²¹

The public, too, has become equally skeptical. A total of 72 percent of today’s respondents link Russia’s dramatic production slump and the decline in its standards of living with the attempts to emulate Western economic practices. This segment of the voters believe that Russia has its own road to take, while 75 percent of the population say that this country can do without Western assistance altogether.²²

2.5 Russia’s “imitation democracy”

Summing up, the current record of democracy in Russia is characterized by a basic contradiction. The effective implementation of mechanisms that emulate Western political practices is not matched by an adequate domestic “contents”. There is hardly any civil society and popular involvement in politics. For its part, the regime can not be called democratic since it derives its legitimacy not from popular support, but from control over political and economic institutions, first of all property. Finally, although virtually no one questions the course of reforms and democracy, concepts of Westernization and democratization have been largely compromised.

We are dealing here with the 20th-century phenomenon of “imitation democracy”, based on import and assimilation of Western political institutions. This process may stretch over decades. In Japan, it took over a hundred years for the “Westminster model” imported after the Meiji revolution to start working in a way comparable to the way it works in Britain. The same process of filling imported institutions with national contents took over 150 years in most Latin American countries, and is still far from complete, while in India, it is arguable still in the initial phase.²³

In this perspective, Russia, too, is in the beginning of a long road. Imported mechanisms are operable, but they are still a formal framework, a shell, a wrapper of an oligarchic, corporatist and largely criminalized regime. For it, democratic procedures, including elections, are mere vehicles in the power struggle, instruments of rotation and renewal of elites based on various territories, branches of the economy, and administrative functions. It may take several election cycles, perhaps generations, before Russia develops a civil society that will articulate its interests and channel them into the political sphere, thus filling the existing mechanisms with a real democratic contents. But this is at least a starting point, and the 1995-96 elections have proved the viability of democratic procedures.

seeking is to bring Russia down to the level of a regional power without own say in decisions on global matters” (Kremenyuk 1995)

See also: Sidorova 1994.

²¹ Leontiev 1995.

²² Kondrashov 1996, 27.

²³ Fadin 1996, 1.

3 Elections and federalism

The 1996-97 gubernatorial elections in Russia were far less commanding and headline-seizing, as compared to the presidential or parliamentary election races. The fact is, by autumn 1996, there had been a certain election fatigue among Russia's politicians, the media and the population, while the West considered that the game had been made with Boris Yeltsin's victory in July, and hardly paid any attention to the governors' race. However, it is perhaps in the regional struggles that features of the new Russian regime are taking shape.

3.1 A democratic mandate

Like the presidential election campaign, regional elections, too, were an important step towards a democratic legitimization of the political system. For the first time, local leaders were elected directly by the Russian population. The former governors' corps was partly made of "accidental people" appointed by the President of Russia on the basis of their ideological affinity and personal loyalty to Boris Yeltsin rather than representing their respective regions. In this sense, the Federation Council (FC), often called the Senate, i.e. the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament which under the 1993 Constitution was formed of regional heads of the executive, derived its legitimacy primarily from Moscow.

This situation persisted when President Yeltsin signed his Decree no. 1969 on 3 October 1994 (accidentally or not, this was the first anniversary of the bombing of the Russian White House) extending the moratorium on gubernatorial elections for another year, and a follow-up Decree no. 951 on 17 September 1995, suspending regional elections until autumn 1996.

In late summer 1996, after Boris Yeltsin's victory in the presidential race, and just before the expiry of the moratorium on regional elections, there was a strong temptation in Moscow to suspend them once again. In fact, both the authority and the opposition were already exhausted by the electoral battles. The Kremlin was afraid to compromise its presidential victory, and the opposition, demoralized by Gennady Zyuganov's defeat, needed time to regroup its forces. On top of this, after holding an incredibly costly presidential campaign (estimate at \$ 20 billion, see above), the Center simply could not afford further financial support of its candidates. (And in fact it did not. The Kremlin only financed the "pacesetter" campaign of the Saratov governor Dmitry Ayatskov won by a landslide, but after that was only putting its bet on the likely winner).

According to *Segodnya* daily, in August 1996 the Presidential Administration drafted a plan to hold elections in several regions in September, after which a new moratorium on regional elections would have been announced. This secret plan was also endorsed by the leaders of the Communists.²⁴ Its implementation was prevented by Boris Yeltsin's critical heart condition, a sudden possibility of extraordinary presidential elections, and the ensuing hesitations of the elite. The opposition, too, considered this as an opportunity to regain some of the ground lost through Gennady Zyuganov's defeat. The new political circumstances gave a go-ahead to the regional elections.

²⁴ Cherkasov; Shpak 1996.

In other words, gubernatorial elections took place despite considerable anti-electoral phobias of both the Government and the opposition, which can be interpreted as yet another victory of the constitutional procedure over considerations of political expediency. It was the second time during 1996 that the political elite overcame the temptation to call off the elections. Both cases clearly testify to the entrenchment of legal norms and mentality in the Russian polity, and a further advance of procedural democracy. This was also emphasized in Boris Yeltsin's message to the new governors' corps in late December 1996, in which he stressed that they are no longer "voivodes"²⁵, but elected representatives, bound by common responsibility for the future of Russia.²⁶

Further evidence of establishment of the legal norms was provided by the elections of the Amur Oblast governor in the autumn of 1996. Initially the race was won by the opposition candidate Anatoli Belonogov by a margin of 189 votes. The local election commission recognized some minor violations of the electoral procedure (some far away groups of gold miners couldn't vote on time), and the case was taken to court, which ruled to cancel the election results.²⁷ The second election in March 1997 brought Anatoli Belonogov a more convincing victory. Taking an electoral dispute to court, and not deciding it by order and administrative rule was also quite new for the Russian polity, a sign that "Russia's election procedure has become fully legal", as announced by the head of Russia's Central Electoral Committee Alexander Ivanchenko.²⁸

3.2 The two-party game

Like the 1996 presidential race, regional elections were organized and interpreted along bipartisan lines: the Government vs. the opposition. At least it seemed so from Moscow, where sponsors and spectators were split into two camps, sitting on opposite stands, and watching the all-Russian election game.

The governmental camp, or the so-called "party of the authority" (*partiya vlasti*), was guided by the Presidential Administration and by the All-Russian Coordination Council (OKS) headed by Sergei Filatov. It supported almost all acting governors, and also some of the likely winners; sometimes it also supported both the governor and the forerunner: Alexander Belyakov and Vadim Gustov in the Leningrad Oblast, Vassily Desyatnikov and Gennady Shtin in the Kirov Oblast, etc.

The opposition was rallied around the Popular Patriotic Union of Russia (NPSR). It split the candidates into three groups: totally acceptable, relatively acceptable "neutrals", and totally unacceptable. Candidates of the first and second groups were supported by NPSR, regardless of whether they sought such support.

Given such flexible criteria, both camps sometimes ended up supporting the same candidate like the acting governor of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (AO) Alexander

²⁵ *Voivode* was a governor of town or province appointed by the Tzar and later by the Russian Emperor from 16th to 18th century.

²⁶ Volkov 1996.

²⁷ Kamyshev; Shpak 1997.

²⁸ Mulin 1996.

Filippenko. The word of the day in Moscow had it that “the biggest chance has a candidate of the government supported by NPSR”. In other words, it soon became evident that bipartisan political criteria have become extremely ambiguous compared to the presidential elections, if not altogether misleading.

It came at no surprise that both sides interpreted the summary result of the regional elections in their favor. In December 1996, the Kremlin claimed that 20 re-elected governors plus 17 new ones inclined towards the “party of the authority” make the total score 37:8. Opposition, for its part, enrolled all new “independent” governors, that it had supported in one or different way, on its own list, adding them to 14 “own” candidates, and claimed the victory with the score of 25:20.²⁹

Applying this sport-like bipartisan logic, the “party of the authority” has clearly defeated the opposition. NPSR took gubernatorial posts in some traditionally “red” regions (those who voted for the Communists both at the parliamentary and the presidential elections), but not in the regions that voted for Boris Yeltsin in June and July 1996; in other words, the Communists made no advances on the opponent’s territory (See Appendix A: Results of the gubernatorial elections). On the contrary, the “party of the authority” took over some regions that were considered part of the “red zone” (e.g., the Chita Oblast, and the Jewish AO). Among the new opposition governors, there are no secretaries of the CPRF Oblast committees, and only three former Communist deputies in the State Duma; most of them are former heads of regional legislatures, and in this sense “people of the authority”. In a word, one can see a clear lack of qualified regional cadres within the opposition.

Speaking geographically, models of political preferences of the population remained mostly unchanged compared to the presidential and parliamentary elections. The “party of the authority” enjoyed a traditional lead in the prospering Moscow with the surrounding region, and in St. Petersburg. Its other stronghold is the Volga Region (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Saratov, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Ulyanovsk, Astrakhan’) which has recently delegated a number of its representatives to the top positions in Moscow like Vice Prime Ministers Boris Nemtsov and Oleg Sysuev. Prime Minister Sergei Kirienko also has a strong connection to the Nizhny Novgorod elite. Thirdly, it is the resource-rich North (Vologda, Arkhangelsk, Perm’, Komi-Permyak, Yamalo-Nenets, Khanty-Mansi, Taimyr and Evenk AOs, as well as Yakutia-Sakha), and the Far North-East (Magadan, Chukotka, Kamchatka, Koryak AO and Sakhalin).

The opposition performed traditionally well in the North Caucasus (Stavropol’ and Krasnodar Territories), South Siberia (Kemerovo, Altai) and naturally in the so-called “red belt” south of Moscow, encompassing the impoverished Oblasts of the non-black-earth area and some of the black-earth regions (Kaluga, Kursk, Kurgan, Bryansk, Ryazan’, Tula).

3.3 A victory for the “third force”

However, trying to analyze political preferences of the new governors’ corps, traditional political geography and party affiliation turn out to be of little avail. Already during election campaigns, party preferences of most candidates were becoming blurred and arbitrary. After

²⁹ Cherkasov; Shpak 1996.

winning the election, governors were becoming even less confined by the party ideology. They were no longer responsible to bosses and sponsors in Moscow, but rather to the region, and first of all to its economy. If in the early 1990s appointed governors tended to be politically-biased, the new elected governors now have to focus on the local economy.

Loyalty to the party ideology has been immediately questioned by the old Yeltsin rival and new Kursk governor Alexander Rutskoi who was quick to debunk his opposition identity and to pledge cooperation with Moscow in solving the region's problems. Another example of a pragmatic evolution of an opposition regional leader was a prominent critic of the Government, the Krasnodar governor Nikolai Kondratenko.³⁰ Among "red" governors elected before autumn 1996, such evolution was made by leaders of Belgorod, Smolensk and Lipetsk Oblasts. Indeed, some analysts predict a complete "decolorizing" of the "red belt" in which ideological oppositioners will eventually turn into pragmatic managers.³¹ The same holds true for candidates of the "party of the authority" protected by a democratic mandate and no longer dependent on their loyalty to Moscow. In this perspective, it is also interesting to see whether another (after Gen. Rutskoi) newly elected "general-governor" Alexander Lebed', staging a convincing victory in the Krasnoyarsk Territory in May 1998, will eventually moderate his enormous political ambition in favor of a more pragmatic approach, day-to-day economic management of a territory that is "four times bigger than France",³² and bureaucratic trading with Moscow.

"Decolorizing" and de-politicization of the regional leadership has become one of the main outcomes of the elections. A binary "government-opposition" scheme seems to be no longer valid for the analysis; this was a projection of Moscow's political rules into a qualitatively different regional situation. The new regional agenda is not about political labels; it is about day-to-day management of the local affairs, as well as about region's rights with respect to the Center. Consequently, the real winners of gubernatorial elections were neither the governmental, nor the opposition candidates, but the so-called "strong economic managers" (*krepkie khozyaistvenniki*—if only a specific Soviet/socialist term *khozyaistvo* could be translated as "economy"³³). These kind of leaders are symbolized by a figure of the Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Most of the new, or re-elected, governors fall into this category; according to some analysts, they are 35 among 45 elected by the end of 1996.³⁴

"Strong economic managers" emerge as a "third force" on the Russian political scene, i.e. as an alternative to both the Government and the opposition. There's a certain degree of cohesion among them, and they act as an independent, if not officially registered, group within the Federation Council. By some estimates, there are at least 17 members of the FC ready to join the "party of economic managers"; these include supporters of the Government such as the Samara governor Konstantin Titov and the Yakut president Mikhail Nikolaev, and active members of the opposition such as the Chelyabinsk governor Petr Sumin.³⁵

³⁰ Katanyan 1997a.

³¹ Snegov 1996.

³² A name of a popular Soviet play, often cited by Lebed' in his election campaign.

³³ For differences between "economy" and *khozyaistvo*, see Chervyakov 1995, 216.

³⁴ Cherkasov 1996.

³⁵ Cherkasov; Shpak 1996.

Emergence of the regional “third force” marks in a new twist in Russia’s federal politics of the last eight years. Roughly speaking, this can be divided into three periods:

1. The “ideological” period of 1991-1993 in the wake of the August 1991 coup, when the dichotomy of “democrats versus Communists” was projected onto the regional level, and regional leaders were appointed in accordance with their political affiliation.
2. The period of 1993-1996 in the wake of the October 1993 strife, less ideologically charged, but no less politicized, when a model of “the government versus the opposition” was imposed by the Center on the periphery. This period was characterized by a moratorium on regional elections, and a series of bilateral treaties on the division of powers between the Center and subjects of the Federation, starting with the February 1994 Treaty with Tatarstan.
3. The current period in the wake of the 1996-1997 regional elections when governors emerge as the “third force” defying the “government vs. the opposition” model. In fact, both the Government and the opposition, residing and operating in Moscow, favor a more unitary structure of the state, while the regional “third force” is likely to push for greater federalism. Hence a third model emerges, “the Center versus the regions”.

As a matter of fact, current phase could become a period of de-politicization of the federal relations in Russia. As observed by Vladimir Kagansky:

“The construction of the region obliges it to be apolitical. Behaving in the most similar manner, Communists, democrats, technocrats, nationalists holding power in the regions render these political identities senseless. Regionalism absorbs politics proper. But then regionalization is the mechanism of depoliticization and de-ideologization”.³⁶

Today, Russia’s federal structure seems to be moving in this very direction. For instance, the new Federation Council proved to be less politicized than the previous one.³⁷ At the first meeting of the new FC on 22 January 1997 the senators, unlike their colleagues in the State Duma, sidelined their ideological differences and party affiliations, publicly displaying solidarity and lack of intention to split into factions. Preserving the cohesion of the regions, at least at a declaratory level, becomes one of the main political assets of the FC in its disputes with the Government.

3.4 The new role of the Federation Council

As a matter of fact, the new democratic mandate of the FC, and the emergence of a regional “third force” (“party of economic managers”) provide for an enhanced role of the parliament’s upper chamber within the system of state institutions. The post-election Senate starts to behave not merely as an assembly of regional representatives, but as a fully developed and legitimate body of the federal authority, and has shown willing to fight for its own interests in this capacity.³⁸

Before the elections, the FC had little political ambition, enjoying a firmly established (but not formalized) relationship with the Center. This was primarily a forum for personal

³⁶ Kagansky 1995a, 113; Kagansky 1995b; Medvedev 1995.

³⁷ Mulin 1996.

³⁸ Shpak 1997a.

meetings, lobbying and bureaucratic trading between heads of the local executive and members of the federal Government. The trading itself took place within committees and regional associations of the FC, as well as within the federal ministries, most often in the Ministry of Finance. Regional governors and federal executives concluded package deals in which central transfers, subsidies and subventions were traded for senators' votes in approval of the governmental bills. All political activity was mostly confined to the same level of committees and regional associations of the FC: it was there that a "red" senator could demand the resignation of the cabinet, and a democratic senator could attack the Communist Duma speaker; but political declarations were hardly ever taken to plenary sessions. If the FC ever sought greater powers, it was with the aim of selling them later to the Government in exchange for new subsidies, credits, etc.

The FC thus played a typical role of a moderator between the oppositional Duma and the Government, a Russian variant of the mechanism of checks and balances.³⁹ This role was further promoted by the figure of the FC speaker, the Orel governor Yegor Stroev – perhaps the only "heavyweight" politician (he is a permanent member of the top ten in the *Nezavisimaya gazeta* list of Russia's 100 leading politicians) equally appealing to the Government and the opposition. Under his guidance, the FC pursued a moderating, and moderate, role.

But now the context has changed. Since all senators now have full democratic mandates, the FC takes a more assertive stand. From winning tactical concessions from the Government, it turns to a strategic goal: becoming a political player in its own right. Signs of this came as early as the first post-election session of the FC at which speaker Stroev called the Senate "a guarantor of political stability": earlier, this epithet could only be attributed to the President.⁴⁰ It soon became clear that the FC is seeking to amend the Constitution, especially in what concerns budgetary federalism. Demands of the FC put forward in 1997-98 include the following:

- modifying the procedure of adopting the budget, discussing it first in the FC, and only after that submitting it to the Duma;⁴¹
- the right to appoint key ministers in the Government, including the three "power ministers" and the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Senate also issued recommendations to Boris Yeltsin in forming the new Government in March 1997 and in April 1998;
- the right of decision-making in questions of war, peace, and emergency rule;⁴² finally, in the situation of a severe budgetary crisis (wage arrears, non-payments, etc.), and with unpronounced consent of the FC, some of the regional legislatures (e.g. in the Sakhalin and Irkutsk Oblasts) voted to stop paying taxes to the federal Government that is indebted to them; same steps were taken by the Tula governor Nikolai Sevryugin during his last days in office before he lost his post to Vassily Starodubtsev.⁴³

³⁹ Katanyan 1997b.

⁴⁰ Shpak 1997a.

⁴¹ Katanyan 1997a.

⁴² Shpak 1997b.

⁴³ Shpak 1997c.

In a sense, the FC is really determined to redraw the constitutional balance between the Government, the Duma and the Senate, or, to be more precise, between the Center and the periphery. It is all too early to say whether the FC could get as far as breaching the balance of powers, but the State Duma has already shown signs of worry. It recently filed an inquiry with the Constitutional Court questioning whether the FC is a fully legitimate body, since all elected governors become its members automatically.

The new federalist perspective of the FC can also be seen in the re-election of Yegor Stroev as its speaker. He was chosen over the Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov who, despite his profile of *krepkii khozyaistevennik* (“strong economic manager”) and independent behavior on the Russian political scene,⁴⁴ is still seen as a man too deeply involved with the Center and new financial elites, and thus favoring a more unitary Russia. On the contrary, Stroev, having his roots in the heavily subsidized Orel Oblast, is considered to be a true spokesman for the periphery, a man able to promote the federalist agenda much further.

On a more practical level, the 1997/98-model FC has been causing more headaches for Boris Yeltsin and the Government than it used to do previously, voting down two presidential candidates to the Constitutional Court (Mikhail Fedotov and Mikhail Krasnov), declining the governmental law on taxation of the purchase of foreign currency, and adopting the Law on Restitution of Cultural Valuables in its conservative anti-Western wording on the eve of Boris Yeltsin’s visit to Germany in April 1997.

For their part, federal bodies of the executive, first of all the Presidential Administration under Anatoli Chubais and later under Valentin Yumashev, try to counteract the governors’ offensive by reinvigorating the institution of local self-government (e.g. supporting the Vladivostok mayor Vladimir Cherepkov in his fight against the governor of the Maritime Territory Yevgeni Nazdratenko), and the obliterate institution of regional representatives of the President, vesting them with the right to control transfers and use of subsidies to the regions. Then there’s also a carrot: while some of the governors used the All-Russian Actions of Protest in March 1997 and May 1998 to publicly display their dissatisfaction with the Government, it was immediately following these manifestations that some governors were offered posts in the new cabinet.

In general, it seems that the FC has managed to prove its newly found strength to the federal executive. Speaking before the Senate in April 1997, then Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Anatoli Chubais proposed a peace deal: in exchange for cooperation, he promised the governors to leave the regional transfers intact during the sequestration of the 1997 federal budget, and a full access to drafting of the 1998 budget. One cannot but notice the difference between this “big offer” and the old-style private deals between individual governors and ministers: the federal executive now recognizes the FC as a consolidated player, a cohesive and independent political force.

⁴⁴ Luzhkov is also known to have supported, or openly financed, a number of candidates in the gubernatorial elections, like e.g. Valery Zubov, the contender to Gen. Alexander Lebed’ in the governor’s election race in Krasnoyarsk in the spring of 1998. The election was won by Gen. Lebed’.

3.5 The new center-periphery relationship

Endorsement of the FC's role by the federal authorities means a final institutionalization of regional elites under the new regime. Their evolution included a full cycle: from possessing power in the Soviet system – through a period of chaotic regionalization in the early 1990s (including a violent privatization of territory, property and authority) – to their democratic legitimation and political recognition at the federal level after the 1996 elections (see also the scheme in Part 1). Regional elites are now “fully licensed” and incorporated into a vertical structure of the post-Soviet authority.

This can also be described as a gradual transfer from an informal contract between the federal and regional elites based on the Soviet-type bureaucratic trading to a legal division of spheres of influence. The institutionalization of center-periphery relationship takes place both at the level of legal documents (constitutions and charters of the subjects of the Federation; federal and regional laws on federal governance and local self-government; bilateral treaties on the division of powers between the Center and the subjects of the Federation, modeled after the 1994 Treaty with Tatarstan, etc.), and in everyday political practice, including the shaping of electoral systems in the regions. In a word, vested regional interests with respect to the Center are being gradually legalized and put into the foundation of a new federal system in Russia. The regional game is now more and more played on the constitutional field—or at least in a civilized manner.

Another result of the recent regional elections is a changed balance along the center-periphery axis. While in the first half of the 1990s political models were mostly projected from the Center into the periphery (like “the democrats versus the Communists” dichotomy), it is now the regions who exert a greater influence on the Center and generate specific models of political behavior.⁴⁵ The regional component was constantly increasing during the 1995 parliamentary and 1996 presidential campaigns: in the last Duma elections, national party lists were often compiled from regional groups of candidates. Another example was the 1997 disagreement between the Russian Government and the IMF over quotas for the export of oil that threatened the release of the \$ 2,9 billion extended credit for Russia.⁴⁶ Earlier, Russia pledged to remove all quotas, and in fact did so with the exception of two oil enterprises in Tatarstan (in Yelabuga and Kazan'). For a long time, lobbying of the Tartar president Mintimer Shaimiev was prevailing over the demands of the IMF—a situation hardly imaginable in the early 1990s.

When the governmental crisis broke out in Moscow on 23 March 1998, and Sergei Kirienko was commissioned by Boris Yeltsin to form the new Government, it was primarily the regional leaders who were considered for the ministerial posts by the Moscow political elite, or even for the post of the Prime Minister. Names mentioned included the Saratov governor Dmitry Ayatskov, the Samara governor Konstantin Titov (he was offered a governmental post already in March 1997, but declined the offer), the Novgorod governor Mikhail Prusak, the Rostov governor Vladimir Chub, the Yaroslavl governor Anatoli Lisysin, and the President

⁴⁵ Gel'man 1996.

⁴⁶ Bekker 1997.

of Mordovia Nikolai Merkushkin.⁴⁷ The fact that none of them has made it to the new Kirienko Government in no way diminishes the increased weight of these leaders.

Looking into the future, one can expect a growing role of the regional elites towards the end of the current political cycle. By the Duma elections of 1999 and the 2000 presidential elections they are likely to become a political elite of the federal level that might put forward the goal of taking over the Center.⁴⁸ Already now three regional leaders – Yuri Luzhkov, Alexander Lebed’ and Boris Nemtsov – are listed among prospective presidential candidates for the year 2000, making their advances to regional elites; but it might well be that the true regional candidate on the presidential elections will be a more federalist-minded Yegor StroeV.⁴⁹ One cannot write off the Saratov governor Dmitry Ayatskov, whom President Yeltsin has several times mentioned as his “successor” on the throne. In any case, it is evident that now the main story of Russian politics goes about the Center and the periphery, not about the Government and the opposition. From a marginal trade for several thousand individuals inside the Moscow Garden Ring, politics move into a regional dimension. Perhaps here starts a change from chaotic post-Soviet regionalization to more civilized forms of regionalism and federalism.

4 Conclusion: Democracy as victim to geography

Comparing the federal and regional elections, one can observe a basic difference. On the federal level (in the presidential, and especially in the parliamentary elections) political and ideological components featured prominently, while on the regional level, political identification of candidates was giving way to more pragmatic and economy- (or rather *khozyaistvo*-) oriented views.

The traditional political concepts and schemes are hardly applicable for the analysis of local elections in the regionalized, fragmented space; even if sometimes these schemes apply, they turn out to be highly ambivalent. For one instance, the candidacy of Alexander Lebed’ in the Krasnoyarsk elections in May 1998 was opposed both by the “right” and the “left” in Moscow, and both by the Government (which supported the incumbent Valery Zubov), and the Communist opposition (which supported its candidate Pyotr Romanov). In other words, the usual political criteria of “left” and “right” (popular in the early 1990s) and “government” and “opposition” (popular in the mid-1990s) can not explain the developments on the regional scene.

Most important, in the absence of a one-level, single political space in Russia, political parties cannot exist as real forces. Entities that call themselves “parties” are largely symbolic (with the certain exception of the CPRF; however, it feeds on the dead CPSU structure and mentality, and has not yet created any new elite, infrastructure, or even an electorate of its own: everything it possesses comes from the past). Russia’s parties are products of a politicized mentality in Moscow, and their activity has very little grass-root regional basis, as

⁴⁷ Neifeld 1998, 26-27.

⁴⁸ Badovsky 1996.

⁴⁹ Katanyan 1997b.

exemplified by the 1995-97 elections. In a sense, the system of central power institutions and political parties is rather autonomous and self-sufficient.

It is noteworthy that most of Russia's regions have essentially the same interests and programs. The behavior of regions hardly depends on political preferences, electoral origin, or party affiliation of their authorities ("Communists", "democrats", "nationalists", "technocrats", etc.). Certainly, regions pursue varying strategies, but this difference stems from such non-programmatic and non-ideological factors as the availability of resources (natural, political, financial), connections in Moscow, etc. In the course of the recent elections, within the Federation Council, and in the Center-Periphery relations writ large regions tend to pursue a policy of interests, and not of programs. Regionalism is a neo-liberal non-discriminating metaideology, embedded in the horizontal logic of networks, and not in the vertical logic of statism and political authority. In a sense, regionalization is a post-modern exercise in decentration and anti-essentialism. An important fact, however, is that through regionalization the ideology and practices of socialism and communism lose any substance and practical relevance. In a strange and ironical way, the Soviet Communism is eliminated by regionalization, i.e. by local elites and leaders, a large part of which still believe themselves to be Communists. Regionalization is the mechanism of depolitization and deideologization of the post-Soviet space.⁵⁰

Then what about politics? Forced out to the margins of the regional structure, politics turns into a sphere of active marginal behavior, an increasingly alienated and isolated pursuit, a special trade for several thousand individuals in the Center. "Politics" mostly takes place on the federal level, just as parties and programs matter for the Duma or presidential elections, but not so much in the gubernatorial races and regional legislative elections.

This also has far-reaching consequences as far as the democratic principle of representation is concerned. Basing on the analysis of the Duma and presidential elections, it is hard to define them as representative institutions. The entrenchment of procedural democracy alone does not attest to representative democracy. On the one hand, the Duma is mostly concerned with its own vested interests, like day-to-day lobbying and bargaining with the executive. The behavior of the Duma, torn between its own face-saving, physical survival, and earning some material benefits, during the governmental crisis of March and April 1998, is quite educational. As reported by the Russian press, many Duma factions, like Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democrats, and individual deputies simply named the price in U.S. dollars for their approval of Sergei Kirienko's candidacy. After all, the deputies, who back in 1995 had to raise tens, and sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars for their election campaigns, have not yet repaid their sponsors – in cash, or in the form of administrative services like lobbying. Representation of their constituencies takes a back seat to deputies' economic interests.

On the other hand, representation can hardly be found in the institute of the presidency. In contrast to the early 1990s democratic-style Boris Yeltsin going to work in a trolleybus, the contemporary Russian presidency, especially after the spring 1998 governmental crisis, has all the innate features of a Muscovite or Byzantine court: favoritism, nepotism (cf. the role of

⁵⁰ Kagansky 1992a; Kagansky 1992b.

President's daughter Tatiana Dyachenko), corruption, and the authoritarian capriciousness of "Tsar Boris" who is currently considering his (so far unconstitutional) third term in office.

Against the background of non-representative, self-consumed and increasingly marginalized politics in Moscow, regional elections seemed to address the real problems of the electorate in a more convincing manner. This is a reflection on the fact that the post-Soviet population mostly identifies itself not with the federal state, but rather with the regions. Indeed, during the Soviet period, regions emerged as the key elements of the Soviet state and society, quasi-feudal principalities fully in control of their subjects. Any region's population is sort of a closed community, vitally linked to the center and confined by the borders of the region. Some experts point out that up to 90 per cent of all migrations in the Soviet Union took place within regions of the Oblast level.⁵¹ The situation has not changed in the post-Soviet period, and the inter-regional mobility has not truly increased. Regions have essentially remained paternalistic strongholds, centers of guaranteed survival of the population, stages of everyday activity of the people. This holds true for the decaying peripheries, but also to thriving post-industrial centers like Moscow: a Muscovite is much more dependent on Mayor Luzhkov than of President Yeltsin, and finds his identity in being different from the rest of Russia, at least in financial terms.

In consequence, the gubernatorial elections were much closer to the grass-roots, with candidates hopping in helicopters from one village to another, and local groups actively involved. Indeed, the idea of representation seemed to be much more present in the regional, than in the federal elections. Also, as observed in Chapter 2, the governors' corps, and the entire Federation Council, tend to act as a responsible political force, less concerned with day-to-day politics, and preparing to move into the federal political scene by the time of the 2000 presidential elections. In a sense, the systemic effects of the regional elections are arguably more consequential for the shape of the post-Soviet institutions and the entire format of Russia as a federal state.

But once again, here one has to distinguish between the *procedure* (regional elections), the *institutions* (the FC, or even the hypothetical regions-dominated presidency)—and the actual *representation* of the electorate. Regional governors and legislators are part and parcel of Russia's ruling class, and have to abide by the rules of the paternalist and oligarchic game called Russian politics. It is a big question whether Yegor Stroeve in Moscow speaks for the interests of the population of the Orel Oblast, and not for the interests of the agroindustrial complex of Russia's Black Earth Belt, or for Russian domestic producers in general.

Beside that, an even bigger question comes into focus: whether regions indeed *represent* the population—or rather *substitute* the population. On this occasion, Vladimir Kagansky hypothesized that regions (the true agents of the Soviet political systems) are now replacing the individual in post-Soviet politics. Individuals in Russia's provinces relinquish their identity to the regions (local elites and elected representatives). Kagansky depicts not a "society of the individuals", but a "society of regions", and describes the transformation of the last decade not as a popular revolution, but as a "bourgeois revolution of regions".⁵² Regions

⁵¹ Medvedev 1995.

⁵² Kagansky 1995a, 102.

therefore emerge as mega-communes, *Gemeinschaft*-type units in which a person belongs and dissolves, rather than discovers, his/her civil identity. Regions are a territorial embodiment of the outspoken Russian *sobornost'*, communality, ruling out mass participation in politics and emergence of a true civil society.⁵³ Indeed, certain post-Soviet regions treat their subjects even more authoritatively and proprietarily than the old Soviet state did (most notably in Chechnya, but also e.g. in the Maritime Territory (Primorsky Krai), where governor Yevgeni Nazdratenko is pursuing a policy of insider control and administrative protectionism of the economy, strong nationalism and political suppression of any opposition).⁵⁴

In this sense, the regional paradigm does not hold out too much promise for democracy either. A general conclusion is that despite some considerable procedural and institutional gains, federal and regional elections in Russia in 1995-97 have not considerably advanced the principle of public representation. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether representation at all—in a political, but also in a wider semiotic sense—is feasible in an enormous space like Russia, where for much of the national history, common regulations, operable institutions, responsible politicians and rational decision-making have been an exception rather than the rule. In this vast space, there has been all too little necessity to settle down and work at a land plot, to build cities and learn to live side by side with your neighbor.⁵⁵ As argued in Chapter 1, it was this vastness that has prevented Russia from developing civil institutions, civic society and the rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*) – in fact from the entire concept of civility, from *civitas* as a specific Western way of development by urbanization. So far, democracy in Russia has been victim to geography.

But then again, one should ask a question about the applicability of models of democratization and liberalization in indigenous cultures, about the universality and competence of Western liberal democracy in the late 20th century. However, this is a topic far beyond the modest scope and earnest positivism of this paper which would rather end on the note of humility... As put in the Talmud, “He who thinks about four things—what is above, and what is below, and what was before, and what will be after—should not rather have been born”.

⁵³ Kagansky 1995b; Medvedev 1995.

⁵⁴ Kirkow 1995.

⁵⁵ Medvedev 1997c.

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Appendix A: The structure of the Council of the Federation

Speaker: Yegor Stroev (Governor, Orel Oblast)

10 Committees:

1. Committee for budget, tax policy, financial, currency and customs regulation and banking activities

Chairman: Konstantin Titov, Governor, Samara Oblast. 21 members.

2. Committee for social policy

Chairman: Vladimir Torlopov, Chairman of the State Council, Republic of Komi.

10 members.

3. Committee for constitutional law, judicial and legal questions

Chairman: Vladimir Platonov, Chairman of the Moscow City Duma

4. Committee for economic policy

Chairman: Yevgeni Sapiro, Chairman of the Legislative Assembly, Perm' Oblast

5. Committee for international affairs

Chairman: Mikhail Prusak, Head of Administration, Novgorod Oblast

6. Committee for the CIS affairs

Chairman: Oleg Bogomolov, Head of Administration, Kurgan Oblast

7. Committee for agricultural policy

Chairman: Yevgeni Savchenko, Head of Administration, Belgorod Oblast

8. Committee for the affairs of the Federation, the Federative Treaty and regional policy

Chairman: Anatoli Sychev, Chairman of the Oblast Soviet, Novosibirsk Oblast

9. Committee for the affairs of the North and the indigenous people

Chairman: Alexander Nazarov, Governor of Chukotka

10. Committee for science, culture, education and the environment

Chairman: Valeri Sudarenikov, Head of Administration, Kaluga Oblast

Source: Segodnya, 5 March 1997

Appendix B: Results of gubernatorial elections in Russia

Region	Number of candidates	Winner (% votes)	2nd place (% votes)	Political profile of the region	Who supported the winner	Election results as seen by:		
						The authority	The opposition	“ <i>Segodnya</i> ”
Saratov Oblast	3	D. Ayatskov (81.4)	A.Gordeev (16.3)	Red	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Amur Oblast	3	A. Belonogov (60.5)	Yu. Lyashko (24.4)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Leningrad Oblast	7	V. Gustov (52.4)	A. Belyakov (31.7)	Mixed	Econ. man.	PA	NPSR	Econ. man.
Rostov Oblast	3	V. Chub (62.1)	L. Ivchenko (31.7)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Vologda Oblast	6	V. Pozgalev (80.5)	M. Surov (4.3)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Kaliningrad Oblast	7	L. Gorbenko (49.6)	Yu. Matochkin (44)	Mixed	Econ. man.	PA	NPSR	Econ. man.
Kirov Oblast	4	V. Sergeenkov (50.6)	G. Shtin (45.6)	Mixed	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Yamalo-Nenets AO	4	Yu. Neyolov (68.0)	V. Goman (17.0)	Pro-govern	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Pskov Oblast	7	Ye. Mikhailov (56.5)	V. Tumanov (36.9)	Red	LDPR	PA	NPSR	LDPR
Kursk Oblast	4	A. Rutskoi (78.9)	V. Shuteev (17.9)	Red	NPSR	PA	NPSR	PA
Sakhalin Oblast	6	I. Fakhrutdinov (39.4)	A. Cherny (27.4)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Jewish AO	2	A. Volkov (71.6)	S. Leskov (16.6)	Red	PA	PA	PA	PA
Stavropol Krai	5	A. Chernogorov (55.1)	P. Marchenko (40.1)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	PA
Chita Oblast	5	R. Geniatulin (30.9)	Ya. Sheviryaev (22.7)	Red	PA	PA	PA	PA
Kaluga Oblast	3	V. Sudarenkov (63.5)	O. Savchenko (30.5)	Mixed	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Khanty-Mansi AO	2	A. Filippenko (72.3)	G. Korepanov (9.3)	Pro-govern	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Magadan Oblast	3	V. Tsvetkov (45.9)	V. Mikhailov (41.3)	Mixed	Econ. man.	PA	NPSR	Econ. man.
Altai Krai	3	A. Surikov (49.4)	L. Korshunov (46.1)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Kamchatka Oblast	6	V. Biryukov (60.9)	B. Oleinikov (27.7)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Murmansk Oblast	8	Yu. Yevdokimov (43.5)	Ye. Komarov (40.7)	Pro-govern	Econ. man.	PA	NPSR	Econ. man.
Komi-Permyak AO	3	N. Poluyanov (70.0)	A. Fedoseev (17.0)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Koryak AO	4	V. Bronevich (46.1)	S. Leushkin (25.3)	Mixed	Econ. man.	PA	NPSR	PA
Ust-Ordynsky AO	3	B. Maleev (38.5)	A. Batagaev (25.8)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Kurgan Oblast	3	O. Bogomolov (67.7)	A. Koltashev (31.9)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Samara Oblast	2	K. Titov (63.0)	V. Romanov (32.0)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man
Ivanovo Oblast	4	V. Tikhomirov (50.1)	S. Sirotkin (22.1)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Nenets AO	7	V. Butov (49.0)	V. Khabarov (39.0)	Mixed	Econ. man.	PA	NPSR	Econ. man.
Astrakhan' Oblast	2	A. Guzhvin (52.0)	V. Zvolinskii (39.0)	Red	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Bryansk Oblast	9	Yu. Lodkin (54.7)	A. Semernev (25.6)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR

Vladimir Oblast	6	N. Vinogradov (62.9)	Yu. Vlasov (22.4)	Mixed	NPSR	PA	NPSR	PA
Perm' Oblast	7	G. Igumnov (64.6)	S. Levitan (29.9)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Khabarovsk Krai	6	V. Ishaev (77.0)	V. Tsoi (7.2)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Arkhangel'sk Oblast	4	A. Yefremov (58.0)	Yu. Gus'kov (33.0)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Ryazan' Oblast	5	V. Lyubimov (56.1)	I. Ivlev (38.4)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Kostroma Oblast	3	V. Shershunov (64.1)	V. Arbuzov (30.7)	Mixed	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Krasnodar Krai	7	N. Kondratenko (82.0)	V. Krokmal' (7.1)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Voronezh Oblast	5	I. Shabanov (48.0)	A. Tsapin (40.8)	Red	PA	PA	PA	PA
Chelyabinsk Oblast	9	P. Sumin (51.0)	V. Soloviev (15.0)	Mixed	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	Econ. man.
Volgograd Oblast	5	N. Maksyuta (50.9)	I. Shabunin (44.2)	Red	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	Econ. man.
Tyumen' Oblast	7	L. Roketsky (58.8)	S. Atroshenko (32.9)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Republic of Khakassia	5	Alexei Lebed' (71.9)	Ye. Reznikov (19.8)	Mixed	Alexandr Lebed'	PA	PA	Lebed'
Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)	5	M. Nikolaev (60.3)	A. Alekseev (26.1)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	Econ. man.
Republic of Marii-El	6	V. Kislitsyn (59.0)	L. Markelov (36.0)	Red	Lebed'	PA	NPSR	Lebed'
Taimyr AO	3	G. Nedelin (64.4)	G. Subbotkin (11.8)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Chukotka AO	3	A. Nazarov (63.0)	B. Yetylen (23.0)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Evenk AO	4	A. Bokovikov (35.9)	A. Yakimov (35.1)	Mixed	Econ. man.	PA	NPSR	PA
Ulyanovsk Oblast	2	Yu. Goryachev (42.3)	A. Kruglikov (33.8)	Mixed	PA	PA	PA	PA
Tula Oblast	4	V. Starodubtsev (62.7)	V. Sokolovskii (15.1)	Mixed	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR	NPSR
Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria	1	Valery Kokov (98.0)	—	Pro-govern	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Republic of Adygeia	3	Aslan Dzharilov (57.9)	Aslanbi Sovmiz (n/a)	Red	PA	PA	n/a	n/a
Republic of Ichkeria (Chechnya)	7	Aslan Maskhadov (59.3)	Shamil Basaev (23.5)	—	PA	PA	n/a	PA

Notes:

Red – regions that voted for the Communists at both parliamentary and presidential elections

Mixed – regions that voted for the Communists at the parliamentary elections and for Boris Yeltsin at the presidential elections

Pro-govern – regions that voted for the “party of the authority” at both parliamentary and presidential elections

PA – “party of the authority”: supported by the Presidential Administration (Anatoli Chubais) and the All-Russian Coordination Council (Sergei Filatov)

NPSR – The Popular Patriotic Union of Russia (Gennady Zyuganov)

LDPR – The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (Vladimir Zhirinovskiy)

Econ. man. – “party of strong economic managers” (independent governors, representatives of the “third force”)

Source: *Segodnya*, 26 December 1996 (updated, as of spring 1997).

