

**POST-SOVIET POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT IN
RUSSIA: OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRATIC
CONSOLIDATION**

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the process of party system formation in the Russian Federation after the collapse of communism. The process of democratization in Russia, which began in 1991, involved a complex restructuring at the institutional, socio-political and even psychological levels. The establishment of political parties and their subsequent development in Russia has been a lengthy and complicated process. This thesis provides a chronological and analytical overview of the main stages of party system development, focusing on such factors and indicators as historical legacy, the State Duma elections, and evolving leadership. Party system development in post-Soviet Russia encountered a number of obstacles, and its future is dependent upon a variety of factors, which are examined in the last sections of the thesis. The conclusion of the thesis evaluates why political parties are weak in contemporary Russia, and attempts to predict the future role of parties in Russian political life.

Keywords: political party; party system; elections; democratization; Russia

To my family

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables	viii
Chapter I. Introduction	1
1.1 Conceptual Framework and Organization.....	4
1.2 Literature Review	9
Chapter II. History of Party Development in Russia before 1991.....	16
2.1 History of Political Movements in Russia before 1905	16
2.2 Abolition of Monarchy and the First Russian State Dumas: 1905-1917.....	23
2.3 Revolution of 1917 and the Consolidation of Communist Regime	28
2.4 The Communist Period and its Legacy for Party Development.....	33
Chapter III. The First Decade of Post-Communist Transition	39
3.1 Stages of Party Formation: an Overview	39
3.2 Transition from Communism: the First Years.....	43
Chapter IV. The Challenge of State Duma Elections for Political Parties 52	
4.1 The 1993 State Duma Elections	52
4.2 The 1995 State Duma Elections	58
4.3 The 1999 State Duma Elections	61
4.4 The 2003 State Duma Elections	64
4.5 The 'Party of Power' During the First Decade of Transition	68
Chapter V. Putin and the Party System: 2000-2007	72
5.1 The Change of Power in Kremlin: from Yeltsin to Putin	73
5.2 Putin's "Managed Democracy" and Political Parties	77
5.3 Citizen and Elite Attitudes toward Political Parties	81
5.4 The New Generation of Parties: United Russia and Just Russia.....	86

Chapter VI. The Future of Party System Development in Russia	92
6.1 Party Reform.....	92
6.2 Regional Elections – March 2007	96
6.3 Potential Problems for the Party System Development	98
6.4 Presidential Power vs. Party Power	101
Chapter VII. Conclusions.....	105
Reference list.....	113

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Results of the 1993 State Duma Election.....	111
Table 2. Results of the 1995 State Duma Election.....	111
Table 3. Results of the 1999 State Duma Election.....	112
Table 4. Results of the 1999 State Duma Election.....	112

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

*Democracy is a device that insures we shall
be governed no better than we deserve.
George Bernard Shaw*

After the collapse of the communist regime in Russia and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia began a long and complex process of post-communist transition and democratization. It was marked by numerous challenges, both for the state and for its people as the monolithic system of one-party state had collapsed destroying the foundation on which social, economic, political and cultural life of its citizens was build upon. Democracy became a logical choice for all former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Russia. While providing for more opportunities and freedoms, democracy also required a creation of new social and political institutions that would support, ensure and promote a new form of government and governance. These organizations include elected legislature, independent judiciary, free and competitive elections and a multiparty system among others. In fact, democracy presupposes the existence of political parties as the key institutions for its survival.¹ However, the establishment of the main political institutions was a long and complicated process, dependent upon such factors as political culture, history, personalities and the socio-economic conditions in the state. There is a growing volume of literature that covers various aspects of democratic transition

¹ See Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Arend Lijphart et al. *Electoral systems and party systems: a study of twenty-seven democracies, 1945-1990*. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)

in Eastern Europe and Russia, often focusing on specific actors and/or factors of this complicated process. This thesis would attempt to contribute to the vast transition literature by analyzing the evolution and development of a multiparty system in post-Soviet Russia and its influence on the establishment of a constitutional and representative government after 1991.

The research for this thesis has two main goals. First, it is necessary to examine the creation and development of political parties and the party system in Russia from a historical perspective. Second, the analysis will focus on how the current party system affects the process of democratization, and in particular, how it influences the development of a representative and responsible government in Russia. While there has been an ongoing interest about party system development in post-communist Europe, relatively little attention has been paid to the specific linkages between the political parties and the emergence of the democratic and representative government in transition states. However, these two concepts (multiparty system and a democratic government) are closely related, especially in the newly democratized countries. Political parties and a party system are considered to be an integral part of the democratic state and its institutions, along with the legislature, the political executive, and independent judicial bodies. In the Russian Federation during the last sixteen years, the role of political parties has often been less visible and (one might argue) less influential in terms of their ability to make decisions on the national level. However, most political leaders in Russia and its principal political parties have been devoted to the goal of creation of a democratic state and its

institutions. It is therefore important to examine how did the Russian party system evolved, as well as its prospects for future development.

In 1991, after the collapse of Communist rule and the dismantling of the USSR Russia* was faced with a challenge of state building within new boundaries, both territorial and ideological. However, a number of serious obstacles posed a serious impediment to a rapid transition. Political culture, historical grievances and lack of understanding of the upcoming transition processes created a sense of estrangement between portions of the ruling elite and the large segments of people. Representative institutions had been fragile throughout Russian history: they either failed to live up to their original purpose or became a façade for authoritarian or totalitarian rule. Nevertheless, it was recognized by most political leaders and activists that the democratic state required a developed multiparty system among other fundamental democratic institutions. But the history and image of the political parties and the party system in Russia was hardly encouraging. Democracy in early post-Soviet Russia required a creation of a constitution that would ensure checks and balances between the three branches of government, and would provide a real opportunity for the people to participate in the decision-making process through the means of free and competitive elections. Naturally, there were many forces that opposed to that goal, and also a large segment of the Russian population simply did not understand the character and institutional dynamics of democracy. Thus, it would

* The Russian Federation (RF) – after 1991 the largest successor state of the former Soviet Union. Population - 142.8 million (2006 census); total area - 17,075,200 sq km; ethnic composition - Russian 79.8%, Tatar 3.8%, Ukrainian 2% (2002 census)

be necessary to find sufficient support for such institutions in the country's political elite and the general population if Russia was going to establish a constitutional government and a democratic and responsible political system with political parties representing interests of various social segments in the decision-making process.

1.1 Conceptual Framework and Organization

Defining a political party is often difficult due to the varying functions, implications and differences in their characteristics depending on social context.² However, political parties became an inalienable part in the study of democracy, and, most importantly, democratic transition. Their effectiveness, organization and electoral performance often serve as one of the measurements of the democracy development and consolidation in post-communist states. For the purpose of my analysis, I will adopt Macridis' definition of a political party as the most suitable and fulfilling in terms of academic description and applicability to the Russian political system. He defines a political party as "an association that activates and mobilizes the people, represents interests, provides for compromise among competing points of view and becomes the proving ground for political leadership".³ He also provides a list of most common and important functions of the political parties (though this list is far from exhaustive), which include representation, conversion and aggregation, integration (participation,

² Paul G. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2000):1

³ Roy Macridis, "Introduction: the History, Functions, and Typology of Parties", in ed. *Political Parties: Contemporary Trends and Ideas*, ed. R. Macridis, p. 9

socialization, and mobilization), persuasion, repression, recruitment and choice of leaders, deliberation, policy formulation, and control of the government.⁴ Thus, political parties play a crucial role in a democratic form of government by serving as a link between a government and an electorate by mobilizing various groups of people around common idea(s) and goals and representing their interests in the government.

It is important to emphasize that while the difference between political parties, political and social movements and interest groups might be vague and intricate at times, this thesis will be focused on those political parties that were a) registered with the Central Electoral Commission, and b) were elected to the Legislature (the Russian State Duma) during the period of 1991-2007.

The establishment and consolidation of political parties is essential for democracy and their effective functioning is detrimental for a responsible democratic government. This idea of indispensability of political parties within a democratic system of governance was covered at length in works of S.M. Lipset, M. Ostrogorski, L. Diamond, and A. de Tocqueville among others. Their analysis of connection between the democracy, liberalism, representative government and political parties was focused on such established democracies as Britain and the U.S and the evolutionary nature of the party system development. However, socio-political conditions have been different for political parties in countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and their development could not follow the same path as it did in Western democratic states. In particular, while the importance of political parties as agents of democratization could not be refuted

⁴ Macridis, 17

in the post-communist countries, the dynamics of their development was specific to social conditions and political culture formed in CEE states. Historical grievances, previous experience with democracy and the socio-political structure of the state all provided a framework within which political parties had to be created. Thus, while the Western democracies evolved along with the ideology and institutions (i.e. party system), in post-Soviet space political parties had to be created within a very limited period of time simultaneously with the establishment and consolidation of other political institutions and procedures. As Lewis argues, political parties encountered a number of structural challenges at the dawn of democratization and due to the nature of the electorate, the parties that did exist, and the context of political competition in post-communist Eastern Europe, the environment was much less conducive to party development than that in 19th century Western world.⁵

The main goal of this thesis will be to examine the evolution and development of political parties after the collapse of communism in Russia as well as their role in the process of democratization and establishment of a representative and responsible government. It is my hypothesis that Russia's party system will continue to be weak and political parties will be indirectly limited in their power by the structure of the state, the political culture of the Russian citizens, as well as parties' internal weaknesses. Based on the analysis, I would argue that the current weakness of political parties and the party system is a reflection of the past and the future, though it does not undermine the process of democratic transition.

⁵ Lewis, 32

This thesis will be divided into seven chapters. In this first chapter, I outlined the main goals of this thesis as well as established a conceptual framework for the analysis. The second chapter will examine the historical evolution of political parties before 1991, covering the period from the first liberal reforms of Alexander II until the collapse of the monolithic rule of the CPSU. Historical analysis will permit an understanding of both the social and the political structure of Russian society as well as the political culture of Russian citizens, which would in many ways determine and shape the party system during the transition period.

In the third chapter, a comprehensive overview of the first ten years of transition (1991-2000) and party evolution will be discussed. It was a period of major challenges for the party system and the political system as a whole, but a creation of a multiparty system lied at the core of successful transition to democracy. This section will look at the number of political parties, their internal structure and their ability to fulfill their functions and their electoral performance. The main goal of this chapter is to trace the development of political parties, to identify their strengths and weakness and to understand their role in political life of the Russian state at the dawn of XXI century.

Chapter four will attempt to analyze the party system development in Russia after 1991 by looking at the four consecutive State Duma elections. The elections play an important role in the establishment and consolidation of political parties: they allow the electorate to voice their political preferences and test the ability of the political parties to mobilize population and transfer electoral support

into legislative representation.⁶ Elections also demonstrate whether the party system is consolidated and stable or whether the parties continue to be weak and flexible. The main goal of this chapter is to assess how did the political parties perform during the elections, and what were the consequences of the elections' results for the establishment of the party system in post-communist Russia.

Chapter five will examine the development of party system under President Putin, from 2000 until 2007. The focus of this section will be on analyzing how the party system changed during this period, and what new social, political and other circumstances emerged that altered the environment within which the political parties are set to function.

The sixth chapter will draw upon the previous chapters, and attempt to outline current as well as future problems in the process of establishing a multiparty system in Russia. What lessons have been learnt by Russian electorate, bureaucracy and government? What kind of system has emerged during the last fifteen years and how does this system affect the functioning of political parties? What incentives and impediments exist within the system that affect the strength of political parties? These and other questions will serve as the basis for an evaluation of the party development in Russia, and also would help to understand the future dynamics of party politics in Russia.

The research will be based on literature review (books, journal articles and interviews in Russian and English), party programs, electoral results and reports, as well as various public opinion polls. This combination of sources will provide a

⁶ This correlation was explicitly analyzed in Mathew Wyman, Stephen White, and Sarah Oates eds., *Elections and Voters in Post-Communist Russia*, (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Pub., 1998)

comprehensive framework and permit an analysis of the role and the importance of political parties, their electoral performance, and their effectiveness as political agents in the government. Official electoral reports will also provide an important source to this research. In particular, reports produced by both the Central Electoral Commission and by international agencies (observers) offer an official account of the constitutionality of the process itself as well as whether political parties acted within a defined set of rules and norms as outlined by the Constitution.

Considering the number of parties registered with the Central Electoral Commission of the Russian Federation (which currently stands at 37) and the scope of this research, it is necessary to narrow the number of political parties examined. Only those political parties that had been elected in the Parliament between 1993 and 2005 will be examined in detail. By limiting the number of parties to those elected at the federal level, we will be able to focus on the parties that were able to gain sufficient trust and support from electorate. Because of the large number of parties, the thesis will largely depend upon a selective sample of the major parties elected to the legislature.

1.2 Literature Review

Before beginning our discussion of party system in Russia, it is necessary to examine the literature that is currently available on the subject. In fact, the history of Russia's party system analysis dates as early as 1914 with the book by L. Martov, P. Maslov and A. Potresov *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v*

nachale XX- go veka. As one of the earliest books on the subject, it introduces a historical analysis of the political movements, associations and factions, which became the early prototypes of the political parties in Russia. The authors examine the development of the political thought as well as the first stages of formation of the individual political parties during the 19th century, providing a valuable insight into the early period of social and political activism.⁷

Another major work on the historical background of political movements in the early 20th century in Russia was done by V. Brovkin in his book *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War* (1994). It provides a complete and comprehensive analysis of the developments of the two major political groups during 1918-1922, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks with careful analysis of not only their internal developments, ideological and policy influences, but also the political structure of the Russian polity during this one of the most turbulent times in the Russian history.⁸ Brovkin argues that the unwillingness of the peasantry to organize as an active opposition and their political apathy contributed significantly to the consolidation of Bolshevik's power.⁹ This lack of political activism and interest in state's affairs would significantly undermine the development of political parties throughout Russian history, especially after 1991.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist rule in Eastern Europe, a large volume of literature began to emerge on the subject of political parties and their role in the process of democratization. Some

⁷ Yulii Martov, Petr Maslov and Alexander Potresov, *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v nachale XX- go veka*. (Peterburg: Obshchestvennaja pol'za, 1909-1914).

⁸ Vladimir Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918-1922*. (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1994)

⁹ see Brovkin.

of the most important and known works include *Party Development and Democratic Change in Post-Communist Europe: the First Decade* and *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* both edited by P. Lewis, *Elections, Parties and Representation in Post-Communist Europe* by F. Millard, among others.

P. Lewis in his book *Political parties in post-communist Eastern Europe* examines the process of party system creation in Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism, the challenges of the system and the institutional development within which the new political parties began to function. Based on the study of several Eastern European countries and further comparative analysis, he clearly identifies differences between the development of political parties across the region.¹⁰ It is important to look at democratization from a comparative perspective as some states were able to go through the transition much faster and with less cost than others.

F. Millard in her *Elections, parties, and representation in post-communist Europe* provides an overview of electoral systems, representation and electoral base in post-communist states. She clearly emphasizes the electoral function of the political parties as the essential agents of a democratic system.¹¹

There is also a growing volume of literature on the study of political parties in post-Soviet Russia. In particular, works by T. Remington¹², S. Fish¹³, R.

¹⁰ see Lewis (2000)

¹¹ Frances Millard, *Elections, Parties, and Representation in Post-Communist Europe*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

¹² Thomas Remington, *Politics in Russia*, (New York: Longman, (1999); *The Russian Parliament: Institutional Evolution in a Transitional Regime, 1989-1999*. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2001)

Rose¹⁴, and M. McFaul¹⁵ provide valuable resources on the study of party politics in Russia after 1991. These works can be separated into two main categories: those examining the role of institutional design (such as legislative institutions, electoral system, etc.), and those looking at the role civil society and political culture in the formation of political parties in the post-communist period. Taken together, these studies demonstrate how the party system evolved in the first fifteen years of transition and what factors influenced and shaped its formation.

A number of works will be especially important for my further analysis. A book by J. Löwenhardt (ed.) *Party politics in post-communist Russia* provides an outstanding collection of essays on political party system in the Russian Federation, covering such issues as what constitutes a political party spectrum in today's Russia (S. Oates), examination of how the institutional design affects the development of a party system (T. Remington), and the role of the left and the right parties in shaping Russian parliamentarism (R. Sakwa).¹⁶

Works by V. Gel'man, G. Golosov and D. Hutcheson examine regional party politics which is in many respects differs from the party politics at the

¹³ Stephen Fish and Thomas Remington, *The Politics of Institutional Choice: the Formation of the Russian State Duma*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

¹⁴ Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections without Order: Russia's Challenge to Vladimir Putin*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Stephen White, Richard Rose and Ian McAllister, *How Russia Votes*, (Chatham, N.J. : Chatham House Publishers, 1997)

¹⁵ Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: the Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000*. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); *Post-communist politics : democratic prospects in Russia and Eastern Europe*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1993)

¹⁶ John Löwenhardt, *Party Politics in Post-Communist Russia*. (London ; Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1998)

federal level.¹⁷ Their analysis provides a valuable contribution in up-close analysis of regional trends and differences among party affiliation and performance and serves as an important point of reference for understanding how Russian party system functions within at the federal as well as regional levels.

Richard Sakwa's works on Russian politics offer an important source for analysis, as he provides a comprehensive examination of various concepts, institutions, and processes and demonstrates their traditional, deep-rooted interdependence. He argues that the party system is one of the weakest institutions in Russian politics today, and "rather than parties generating the political dynamism that formed government, the regime itself tended to take the initiative in party formation."¹⁸ Sakwa also demonstrates that the multiplicity of parties does not transfer into effective party system, naming "... intrinsic weakness of civil society, the rise of new forms of representing social interests, the fragmentation of 'interests' themselves, and the dissolution of the art of representative politics"¹⁹ as the main obstacles in the party system consolidation and its efficiency in Russia.

Other important works on the study of political parties in Russia include *Unexpected Outcomes: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Representation in Russia* by R. Moser, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy* ed. T. Colton

¹⁷ See Vladimir Gel'man et al., *Making and breaking democratic transitions: the comparative politics of Russia's regions*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Grigorii Golosov, *Political parties in the regions of Russia: democracy unclaimed*, (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004); and Daniel Hutcheson, *Political parties in the Russian regions*, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003)

¹⁸ Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 3d ed. (London: Routledge, 2002):172

¹⁹ Sakwa (2002),199

and M. McFaul. A recent book by H. E. Hale, *Why not parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State*, carefully examines public opinion surveys, provides interviews with Russian politicians, examines electoral campaigns, and provides a careful analysis of voting patterns (at the federal and regional levels).

There is also a growing number of in-depth studies of parliamentary elections in Russia such as *The Russian Parliamentary Elections of 1995: the Battle for the Duma* by T. J. Colton and M. McFaul; *Elections and political order in Russia: the Implications of the 1993 Elections to the Federal Assembly* by P. Lentini (ed.); and *The 1999-2000 elections in Russia: their impact and legacy* by V. L. Hesli and W. M. Reisinger (eds.).²⁰ These works would be used for a closer study of electoral performance of political parties later in this thesis.

The main goal of the thesis is to analyze the role, dynamics and influence of the multiparty system on the development of a democratic and responsible government in post-Soviet Russia. Russian political parties developed within a completely different set of socio-political conditions and their strength was undermined by a complex interplay of attitudes and values of the elite and the Russian citizens. However, this alleged weakness of the party system does not undermine Russian transition to democracy because it reflects interests, values and political traditions of the Russian electorate. It would be a mistake to expect

²⁰ Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, *The Russian parliamentary y elections of 1995: the Battle for the Duma*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Peter Lentini (ed.) *Elections and political order in Russia: the implications of the 1993 elections to the Federal Assembly*, (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 1995); Vicky Hesli and William M. Reisinger (eds.). *The 1999-2000 elections in Russia: their impact and legacy*, (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Russia to form a multiparty system equivalent to that in Western democracies due to the fundamental differences in socio-political history and values of the people. The weakness of political parties in Russia is therefore a reflection of its social and political structure as well as values and interests of the people.

CHAPTER II. HISTORY OF PARTY DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA BEFORE 1991

*History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce.
Karl Marx*

A historical overview of party system development is fundamental for our understanding of the dynamics of post-communist transition in Russia and the formation of the party system in particular. It had already been noted that the lack of previous democratic experience and poor knowledge of the foundations of representative government in Russia were among the key reasons contributing to the weakness of political parties after 1991. This chapter will look at the process of party formation in Russia before 1991 and how this historical legacy determined the process of party system development after the collapse of communism.

2.1 History of Political Movements in Russia before 1905

Throughout Russia's history, the monarchy was the soul and core of the Russian state and its people. The influence of the monarchy - and the Romanov dynasty in particular - cannot be underestimated as it significantly affected the formation of values and traditions that would find their reflection in the future socio-political structure. The tsar was not just a supreme sovereign, but he was the Father of its people (*Tsar-Bat'ushka*) who had allegedly God's blessing to rule. Though each monarch had his/her own vision of Russia which was reflected in their policies and the governing style, the traditional patrimonial, system of governance with all its aspects of domination prevailed throughout Russia's

history.²¹ Thus, there was little fertile ground for development of political parties until late nineteenth century. It was not until Alexander I that the first liberal-oriented reforms were initiated in Russia.²²

During his time on the throne (1801-1825), Alexander I established an environment where liberalism had a potential to develop from its embryonic form. They included lifting restrictions on traveling abroad, allowing foreign book and periodicals to enter Russia, relaxing censorship on publishing, abolishing torture in investigations, and returning the powers granted to the gentry by Catherine the Great (which were abolished later) among others.²³

The next set of reforms included proposals by one of the greatest intellectuals of the 19th century in Russia Mikhail Speransky (who served as advisor to Alexander I during 1807-1812).²⁴ In particular, he recommended a major change in the socio-political structure of Russia by separating the three levels of government (the executive, the legislature and the judiciary), introducing the first step toward principles of democracy and constitutionalism within an autocratic government. Speransky's proposal for a constitution (which came a century before a first representative government in Russia was established) had a great historical significance: for the first time in Russian history his draft

²¹ See Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974); Michael Alexandrov, *Gosudarstvo, Biurokратиia i Absolutism v Istorii Rossii*, (St. Petersburg, Wolf Publishing, 1910)

²² There were earlier efforts to partially liberalize Russian monarchic system. For the example, during the reign of Catherine the Great, some steps were taken to create an advising council and introduce limited political rights. However, such efforts did not include significant efforts to introduce representative mechanisms such as political parties.

²³ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press Inc., 2005), 282

²⁴ For more on the life and political career of M. Speransky see Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky, statesman of imperial Russia, 1772-1839*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969).

constitution incorporated many principles concerning representative democratic government. The constitutional proposal included various basic rights and freedoms (though different for each social class). Some other major provisions included reorganization of local administration and a call for legislative assemblies at various levels including the establishment of the national legislature – the all-Russia State Duma. Eventually, Alexander I became quite suspicious about the political change and this led to the death of the constitutional proposal. Liberal ideas continued to linger among educated middle class and youth, but they failed penetrate the repressive controls of the Tsarist system. One can argue that at this stage, liberalism did not gain enough definition and strength to penetrate through the traditionalism and patrimonialism of the state.

In the second half of his reign, Alexander I proved to be a rather weak reformer. He re-reverted his laws and reforms under both criticisms from the conservative forces and his own reluctance to liberalize.²⁵ Under such conditions, it is not surprising that revolutionary ideas started to surface among various groups, particularly in the ranks of the army, where young army officers (who were mainly sons of higher middle class and were educated by private and often foreign tutors) had relative security and opportunity to exchange ideas, books, and have discussions on the nature of the state, people, humanity and rational reasoning. The new movement, which became known as the Decembrists (after an attempted coup in December 1825) demanded constitutional government in one form or another. Their ideological position was not uniform, but varied with

²⁵ Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 296

respect to such factors as the distribution of powers, allocation of social and political rights, and different forms of government. What was common to the Decembrists program, however, was that Russia should establish some kind of constitutional and limited government. Decembrists proposed three major areas of reform: 1) fundamental political reform, 2) social reform, and 3) a combination of both social and political reforms with focus on strong social base and support before the political reform.²⁶ One can argue that this first the first revolutionary political organization, that had some features resembling a political party.

The revolutionary movement of Decembrists staged an unsuccessful coup against Nicholas I on December 14, 1825 (his coronation day) which led to not only a harsh response from the government, but also resulted in a devastating blow of ideals and beliefs which had become prominent among segments of the better educated higher class youth. Nicholas I, who succeeded Alexander, was quite a different personality than his more liberal and indecisive predecessor. His rule was marked by great social and ideological repression, rigid control of all outlets of social and political thought (including education, religious schools and prohibition of any form of collective assembly), and traditional patriarchal conservatism. Political opposition was suppressed and the embryo of early democratic movement in Russia once again became the victim of a repressive regime. Under Nicholas I, any hope for the emergence of political parties and genuine competition faded away.

The next stage of liberal evolution and party development in Russia began with the accession of Alexander II to the throne. His vision of a more liberal

²⁶ Harry Dorosh, *Russian Constitutionalism*, (Exposition press: New York, 1944), 67

Russia with some form of self-governance at the local level, as well as some basic freedoms was influenced by both Russia's economic backwardness, and also the pressure put on the government by intelligentsia. It became evident that Russia had fallen behind in the process of rapid industrialization, political transformation and ideological change that had taken place in most European states. Alexander II realized that Russian position and the weakness of the existing regime and its lack of sustainability was among the main reasons pushing Alexander II to pursue a course of reforms. In his speech before marshals of the Russian army on March 30, 1856 he announced the end of serfdom in Russia and stated that "It is far better that this come from above than from below."²⁷ Serfdom was the fundamental social structure upon which the system of autocracy rested and the ending of this system was a major benchmark in Russian history.

As A. Ulam noticed, "the striking thing about Russia between 1855 and 1905 was that while it remained an absolute monarchy and a police state, her political life was greatly influenced and in many ways shaped by public opinion."²⁸ In sharp contrast with his father, Alexander II (also known as Alexander the Liberator) demonstrated a much more liberal ruling style and was the initiator of some of the most radical reforms in the history of monarchy in Russia. Alexander II recognized the growing importance of legitimacy of his government, especially considering the developments both inside and outside Russia. Intellectuals that

²⁷ Larissa Zakharova, "Autocracy, Bureaucracy, and the Reforms of the 1860s in Russia," *Soviet Studies in History* (Spring 1991), 6-33

²⁸ Adam Ulam, *Russia's Failed Revolutions: From Decembrists to the Dissidents*, (Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1981), 71

have been concerned with the future of Russia began to exert significant pressure on the government and contributed to organization of intellectual opposition. That would play a detrimental role in shaping the first loosely structured political organizations and discussions groups that would emerge as political parties in 1905.

The reforms initiated by Alexander I covered a number of areas, including education, military, local self-government and censorship to name a few. One of the most fundamental reforms as already mentioned that Alexander II introduced was the emancipation of serfs in 1861. This brought down not only a social structure which dominated Russia for most of its history but changed the dynamics social relations, attitudes and values. By demolishing one of traditional structures within the Russian state, it gave rise to new opportunities, redefinition of social and political relations and provided a new framework where liberalism had a potential to develop..

The next logical step was a creation of some form of self-government. Thus, in 1864 *zemstvos* – the legislative assemblies at the local level - were established as a part of Alexander's II Great Reforms. The *zemstvos* were organized on a regional level (both in towns and provinces) as a basic form of self-government. The most important characteristics of this newly created institution were its elective nature and separation from both the tsarist bureaucracy and the autocracy. *Zemstvos* were established in thirty four

provinces of Central Russia and adjacent provinces.²⁹ *Zemtsy* (or *zemstvo* deputies) were elected for a three - year term, and during the first years predominantly consisted of representatives from the gentry, though other social classes eventually increased their proportion of seats. The main functions of the *zemstvo* institutions included managements of local welfare, including agriculture; education; matters of registration of deaths, births, and marriages; medical care and infrastructure building. However, Porter and Gleason outline the basic dependence of *zemstvos* on the tsarist officials and the government.³⁰ The language concerning functions and jurisdiction of *zemstvos* was vague and permitted a very limited sphere within which the *zemstvos* could function. Thus, as an institutional agent of liberalization *zemstvos* was rather weak and limited in its influence. On the other hand, the *zemstvos* were the first organized form of self-government recognized by the government, which was relatively independent (at least, in design) and had both national and local dimensions, *zemstvos* played a crucial role in serving as a cradle of Russian liberalism. Thus, *zemstvos* provided both the institutional structure for self-government and an outlet where the more liberal segments of the society were allowed to form a forum for discussion of Russia's ideological and political future. It was the first arena where Russian liberals began to formulate their position and organize themselves into political groupings (some of which later emerged as political movements and political parties).

²⁹ Theodore Porter and William Gleason, "The *Zemstvo* and the transformation of Russian Society," in *Emerging Democracy in Later Imperial Russia*, ed. M.S. Conroy, (Niwt, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1998): 65

³⁰ Porter & Gleason, 65-67

The weakening of the zemstvos as liberal 'talking shops' at the beginning of 1890's had serious repercussions for Russian intelligentsia and liberalism. The reasons for this failure were multiple and complex. One of the fundamental obstacles that zemstvos encountered was a lack of adequate response from the government, and diversion from the road of liberal reforms taken by Alexander II. Once again, the personality of the monarch played a crucial role in the stagnation socio-political transition in Russia. Another commonly identified problem of this period was the inability of liberals to formulate and advance their claims as well as organize a coherent movement or political party that would be able to not only clearly articulate ideas and set the agenda, but would also to implement it under the extremely explosive social and political conditions. Indeed, we will see this trend throughout the next century of Russia's political life.

2.2 Abolition of Monarchy and the First Russian State Dumas: 1905-1917

As previously mentioned, at the dawn of the twentieth century a number of social, political and economic factors set in motion a process that would demolish monarchical rule, provide an environment for creation of the first representative institutions, and dramatically change socio-political landscape of Russia. What are the factors that contributed to this rapid change of Russian society during the last years of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century? First of all, the elimination of serfdom and the disruption of the tradition patterns of life and labour in the countryside led to a massive deterioration of living conditions in villages across the country. Former peasants began to move into the cities and towns in their search for jobs. This massive migration coincided with the process

of industrialization and rapid growth of factories, creating a new class of citizens. This working class, while mainly uneducated sought its place and greater role in the society, greater social and political freedoms and a voice on the political arena.

During the last two decades, political movements began to organize themselves into more concrete and stable organizations. The movement was primarily initiated from below by the peasantry, the emerging working class, and segments of gentry and lower class professionals. People's dissatisfaction with the social and economic conditions peaked during the frightful famine of 1891-92 and revived the momentum of liberalism.³¹ Liberals were finally able to organize themselves and the first political organization named the Union of Liberation was formed in 1903 at the second congress of the party. In 1905, the Union of Liberation was transformed into the Constitutional Democratic Party, or the *Kadets*, led by P. Miliukov.

Other parties also emerged in the last decade of the 19th century. Among them were a number of nationalist parties (Russian Polish, Armenian, etc.), the radical United Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadet), as well as the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (1898), a faction of which (the Bolsheviks) would later become the party that would rule Russia for the next 70 years as the CPSU.³² Thus, this period of rapid industrialization and increased political consciousness resulted in formation of the first political parties. Thus, the process of party formation continued and accelerated under the

³¹ Riasanovsky, 378

³² Eventually, it would be Lenin's conception of how this party should function that would shape seven decades of Eurasian political rule.

growing dissatisfaction with the regime and deteriorating socio-economic conditions.

The first institutional arrangement for representative government came as a result of increasing pressure on Nicholas II. The “Bloody Sunday” (a protest demonstration of workers on January 22, 1905 which ended with the death of hundreds of people when the police opened fire) led to a greater sense of frustration and gave the revolutionary movement another push.³³ As the unrest and strikes continued, Nicholas II was pressured to take a step towards a more representative system of government. On August 19, 1905 the Tsar signed a manifesto which created an elective Duma with consultative powers. However, social unrest continued to rise despite some attempts of the government to reduce tension through decrees.

In October the situation culminated with massive strikes and uprisings and the October Manifesto was signed by Nicholas II. The October manifesto truly altered the political structure of the Russian state. In particular, it guaranteed civil liberties to Russian citizens, established a true legislative body (Duma) with full powers to pass the laws and promised further improvements in the system. The Executive power remained with the Tsar. Nevertheless, it was the first step towards providing an institutional structure for a representative governmental body, where political parties would be able to function.

The first State Duma convened on May 10, 1906. The elections were complex and had many limitations, but nevertheless it was the first time in Russian history when the people and the state were connected through a

³³ Riasanovsky, 380

complicated form of representative governance. Given the events of the previous year, it is not surprising that the governmental representatives did not receive many seats in the new Duma. The Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets) were able to gather 38% of seats (184 deputies), followed by the left wing parties with 124 deputies, and 112 deputies had no political affiliation.³⁴ Radical left parties such as the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionary parties boycotted this election. In terms of their social class, the majority of the Duma members belonged to the peasantry class (39%), followed by the gentry (almost 25%), which was highly unproportional to the social structure of Russia at that time, where up to 85% of citizens were classified as peasants.³⁵ This invariably led to a gap between the Duma and the government, which resulted in the inability of the First Duma to carry out its functions due to failure of the elected legislators and the government (the Tsar and his ministers) to work together. After seventy- three days of attempts to find a mutual ground on the issues (or defend their own) the Duma was dissolved by a manifesto signed in Viborg by almost half of the Duma deputies.

The second Russian Duma convened in March 1907. It was designed to be more cooperative with the government and this was achieved through electoral law. It was also larger than the previous one – the number of legislator increased from 497 to 520.³⁶ The second Duma was more to the left at the political spectrum than its predecessor, partly due to the fact that Social

³⁴ Walsh cited in Riasanovsky, 383

³⁵ William Walsh, "The Composition of the Dumas", *Russian Review* Vol. 8 No. 2 (April 1949):112

³⁶ Walsh, 113

Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats participated in the elections this time.³⁷ The representation of Cadets in the Second Duma declined from 184 to 99 deputies; the Left increased their number of seats from 124 to 216; the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionary gained 64 and 20 deputies respectively.³⁸ However, it was also unable to work with the government and was dispersed by the prominent reformer, the Prime Minister P. Stolypin.³⁹

The third Russian Duma served its full term from 1907-1912, largely dominated by the government supporters, and the opposition took only 120 out of 442 seats. These seats were divided between 54 Cadets, 33 representatives of the Left and a small number of other moderate members.⁴⁰ This Duma was a clear reflection of the decision of Nicholas II to move away from his previous course of political reforms, and the attempts of his government to subdue the legislative institutions and their power.

The Fourth Duma also almost served its full term from 1912 until the February revolution of 1917. After 1907, those who supported the ideas outlined in the October manifesto (they were called the Octobrists) gained a prominent position in the Duma by representing a wider class of Russian citizens and remaining at the centre of the political spectrum thus largely replacing the Cadets.⁴¹ Cadets also remained an important voice in the Duma despite the attempts of the government to gain the majority in the 1912 elections.

³⁷ Walsh, 113

³⁸ Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 385

³⁹ *ibid.*, 384

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 386

⁴¹ *ibid.*

The representation of political parties in the first four Russian Dumas was indicative of an unstable, shifting political situation. Despite the attempts to introduce some representation into the system, the party system had failed largely because of the reluctance of the Tsar to surrender his powers to the legislative body and an inability of the opposition party to overcome the constraints of the system. No political party was able to build a platform that was both effective and representative with concrete policy proposals and strong support from the general public. The electoral results were a product of the internal struggle among revolutionary groups, an erratic and an inadequate electoral system as well as poor coordination of the relationship between the monarch and the Duma.

2.3 Revolution of 1917 and the Consolidation of Communist Regime

There is a voluminous literature on the causes, the course and the consequences of the Russian revolution of 1917. This part of the thesis will briefly examine the events and analyze their significance for the formation of political parties and the political culture of the Russian populace in the several decades to come following the Revolution.

In the years leading to the February Revolution, Moscow and Petrograd (St. Petersburg) experienced a growing number of strikes among workers, who demanded higher food portions and higher wages. Finally, in the last days of February the general strike paralyzed all factories and the capital itself. The situation culminated during February 27-March 1, 1917 (old calendar) when

Nicholas II abdicated, the Duma was dispersed and in its place a provisional government was established.

The period between February and October became known as *dvoevlastie* (dual power), which was shared between the Provisional Government and the Soviet's (an organization representing workers). Finally, on November 7, 1917 the armed uprising of Bolshevik-led soldiers, sailors, and the Red Guards of workers' stormed the Winter Palace in Petrograd (St. Petersburg). Two days later, the new Soviet Government was created under the name of the Council of People's Commissars with V.I. Lenin as the chairman. The main political organization that orchestrated and carried out this revolution was the Bolsheviks and their influence in the newly installed government was paramount. However, there have been a number of challenges. In particular, in the elected Constituent Assembly (the main legislative body, members of which were elected in the general elections), the majority of 707 seats were held not by Bolsheviks (with only 170 seats), but by the Socialist Revolutionaries (370 seats).⁴² While the election to the Constituent Assembly was probably one of the most democratic steps during this period in Russia and had a huge significance for party development and legitimacy in the post-imperial Russia, it failed to fulfill its expectations. The assembly was dissolved in January 1918 by V. I. Lenin. This move consolidated the position of the Bolsheviks as the dominant party in the country and their authority in the country (though, they would have to fight a civil war to consolidate their position).⁴³ It was Lenin's vanguardist notion of his party

⁴² Riasanovsky and Steinberg., 463

⁴³ *ibid.*

formed during his years underground and the militant struggle during the first years that would shape Russia's single party system during the next seven decades.

Why was it so difficult for political parties to emerge during the initial period of the Soviet rule (1917-1921)? First, the majority of the politically active population (workers, peasants that moved into towns, professionals, and others) were strongly affected by the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Labour Party and its propaganda. After the collapse of monarchic rule, it was this party that gradually emerged as the strongest force on Russian political landscape. The idea that the newly created government would allow for greater political freedom, representation and accountability was widespread among the general population. However, by the end of the dual power period in 1917 and during the first months after the October revolution, Lenin's Bolsheviks gradually created an environment in which it was impossible for other political parties to flourish.

Secondly, the direction of Lenin's ideas and his vision for Russian governance did not facilitate party development in Russia. Lenin's idea of governance was not based on parliamentary democracy where political parties are the key players, but rather on a republican form of governance, represented by the Soviets.⁴⁴

Thirdly, Lenin was faced with the danger of competing faction within his won radical political movement. Thus, in order to avoid any threat to the monopoly position of the Bolsheviks it was decided during the 1921 Tenth party

⁴⁴ Alexander Ivanchenko, "Rossijskoe Gosudarstvo v Novoy Istorii", in *Rossijskoe narodovlastie: razvitie, sovremennye tendentsii i protivorechija*, eds. A. Avtonomov et al., (Fund: New Liberal Mission, Novoye Izdatel'stvo, 2005):45

Congress that no further factions will be allowed within the RCP. Lenin's determinism to end factionalism within the party was further intensified by the Kronstadt naval rebellion in February 1921. In 1922, this decision was taken further by making the Communist Party the only official party in Soviet Russia. As a result of this rapid centralization and consolidation of power, other political parties were unable to achieve the same level of internal organization and unable to mobilize segments of the electorate as an opposition force to the Bolshevik rule.

Thus, the period between 1917 and 1921 was characterized by consolidation of Bolshevik rule, creation of procedures and institutions that would legitimize and consolidate their power in the government. The large party bureaucracy had emerged to control the country. In the first years of their power, the Bolsheviks recognized a need to secure their position as the leading political party and increase their popular support and legitimacy. To achieve that goal, Lenin and his comrades constrained liberalization, but gave power over land to peasants, and established formal representative institutions at all levels of governance. At the same time, the Bolsheviks were shaping ideological and political life Russia within the Marxist-Leninist stream of thought. Party rule through the Soviets became the dominant form of governance during this period, spreading from Moscow and Petrograd to smaller cities and towns, and eventually to the countryside. The new structure, ideological direction, and membership were in many ways directed by and based upon the ideas developed by Lenin; his authority in the new government and the party

organization he had built explained the success with which the Bolsheviks took control over the government and the country.

As a result of the Bolsheviks' success, the opportunity for development of a multiparty system during this period was greatly diminished. According to C. Weiss, as the Soviet regime gained strength, the majority of political parties were forced into exile.⁴⁵ Among the most prominent ones are the Mensheviks, the Anarchists, the Monarchists, the Smenovekhovtsy, and others. Their influence on the course of politics was eliminated by repression, as well as by their exclusion from the system on the one hand and by poor organization in exile on the other. Most of them maintained their interest in Russian affairs, and some even wrote about it, but their ability to mobilize into a viable political organization waned under the circumstances. Opposition forces that remained within Russia were subsequently eliminated through political repressions, further suppressing all forms of political party pluralism in Russia.

The period between 1918 and 1924 (the year of Lenin's death) became the most important and definitive not only for the Bolsheviks, but also for the Russian political history as a whole. During these years the Bolsheviks were able to gain support and legitimacy as well as consolidate their power in the government. The civil war that erupted in 1918 between the Red Army and the Whites (the opposition force) torn the country apart, straining such scarce resources as food and people's trust into its leaders. After all, the Whites failed to reconcile their differences and gain popular support; they became too fragmented

⁴⁵ Claudia Weiss, "Russian Political Parties in Exile," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Volume 5, Number 1, (Winter 2004):219-232

to win this civil war. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, gained from their strong support among workers and professionals, their ability to mobilize the population and develop support for their ideological direction.

Without going into further detail about the complexities and dynamics of political development during this period, it is important to mention that this failure of democracy implies an important lesson: political parties need a strong social base in the society as well as a government system which is conducive to their emergence and development of independent organizations. Without stable institutional design and active political participation, it is impossible to create a responsible and representative government. The political parties have to emerge from the bottom up in order to fulfill their functions.

2.4 The Communist Period and its Legacy for Party Development

For most of the twentieth century Russia was in a state of political hibernation, ruled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which spread its control from the socio-political and economic spheres to private life and personal beliefs and values. There is a large body of literature which discussed the role of the CPSU from 1917 to 1991, the subject of which goes far beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to look at the structure and legacy of the communist regime, and the many ways in which it shaped the development of post-Soviet party system and political parties.

The rise and consolidation of communist power in the 1920's eliminated any official opposition in the government and consequently in the society. Lenin's Marxist Socialist ideology became the foundation of the government established

a political framework for state building, and where alternative political parties had no opportunities to function. As the only legal political party in the Soviet Union, the CPSU held a supreme authority over all areas of policy-making and its hierarchical structure and extensive system of personnel control ensured full control over all spheres of political and public life. Membership in the Party was also impressive: through various children's, youth and professional organizations mobilizing population from a very young age, the CPSU engraved its ideology into the belief systems of Soviet citizens, shaping their social, political and professional behaviour.

The CPSU acted simultaneously as the executive, the judiciary and the legislature holding supreme authority over all areas of policy and decision-making. Thus, the political environment prevented an evolution of political organizations that would have a potential to evolve into political parties capable of challenging the communist regime. The period of J. V. Stalin (the General Secretary of the Central Committee 1922-1953) played a crucial role in forming not only the repressive political system which was under totalitarian control but also shaping the political culture of people. Out of fear of repressions, political prosecution and concentration camps any opportunity for pluralism and alternative party activity was nonexistent. Thus, political activism was suppressed from the top by the extensive and repressive bureaucratic machine and from the bottom by eliminating all means of political organization, by building support for the communist regime and by discouraging any form of political dissent through public trials and harsh sentencing. During seventy years of communist rule there were periods of partial relaxation or liberalization of the regime (e. g. "the thaw"

during Khrushchev's period), but the system continued to suppress any form of political opposition and political organization, preventing an emergence of the political parties.

However, even within this repressive socio-political regime some dissident elements were able to emerge in the post-Stalin period. Their ability to gather for discussion, write and publish was extremely limited and many of them left Soviet Union after "the thaw" in late 1960's and early 1970's. Among the most distinguished names were Andrei Sakharov, Joseph Brodsky, Andrei Sinyavsky, Alexander Ginzburg and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Their active voice against the regime resulted in imprisonment, labour camps and later exile. However, due to their small numbers and the grip of political censorship they were unable to mobilize and exert major pressure on the regime. Thus, the dissidents contributed insights regarding the Soviet communist regime while residing outside of the USSR, but their impact on the party system formation in early 1990's was insignificant.

The implications of the Soviet regime for development of political parties and the party system in Russia are hard to underestimate. In particular, the CPSU created an image of political party as a repressive rather than representative actor in the government. After the collapse of communist rule, the people of the Russian Federation had little faith or trust towards political parties and people's ability to influence the course of political transition after 1991. Russian citizens became very suspicious of both their ability to affect the decision-making and their political future as well as the nature of the newly created parties.

As the number of political parties continued to grow rapidly in the early years of transition, these political organizations/groups did not transfer into an effective organization of people in political parties. The main problem was that the majority of parties had a tendency to oppose the previous regime without offering a clear alternative and many of the early political activists formed parties based on short-term interests and goals, with little or no strategy, program and/or internal organization. These numerous political parties became known as 'sofa parties' because their members could be easily seated on one sofa. This

Another major obstacle to the democratic transition that was strengthened by the communist regime was Russia's lack of democratic experience. While it is possible to suggest that the period between 1905-1917 can be classified as the first attempt to establish a democratic form of government, the political system was too distraught for the government and the people to fulfill their obligations and exercise their rights as well as to benefit from the rights and freedoms which are fundamental for any democratic system. The Soviet period further undermined people's ability to hold political responsibility, to organize around common ideas and values, and to provide an input into policy-making process.

Mistrust towards political party as an entity was deeply engraved into political culture of Russian citizens. For them, political party did not hold the same value and did not have the same image as it does in most developed democracies. CPSU's role and power during the Soviet era changed the concept of political party in Russia from its fundamental meaning and translated it into a weak support and distrust towards its ability to take action in the interests of its electorate and act as a representative, mobilizing political force in the

government. Also, some of the political elite demonstrated little trust in political parties during the first years of independence. In particular, in 1990 Yeltsin quit the party and vowed to not join any other party. McFaul rightfully calls this characteristic “an allergic reaction to parties” of Russian citizens.⁴⁶

Another important political imprint that was left on the people after more than 70 years of communist rule was the image of a political party as oppressive, all-encompassing and totalitarian machinery that controlled every aspect of one’s life. The CPSU was not a just a political party – it was a complex mechanism that encircled, controlled and directed every situation, event, or development in Russia during that period. Everything that was being said, done, or made was in interest of the party and in the name of the party. The political freedom that came with the disintegration of the Soviet Union allowed people to exit from the Communist party and they had little incentive or desire to become a member of another party.

The historical legacy of party development in Russia before 1991 was far from positive, and the social and political environment was not conducive to prompt and smooth emergence of political parties. Years of political apathy, suppression of basic freedoms and rights and the overarching authority of the Communist party fostered feelings of mistrust, suspicion and low levels of faith of people in their ability to impact the political processes in Russia. Also, the traditional role of paternalistic leadership in Russia would play a crucial role in the years immediately following the collapse of the USSR: the image of a strong and

⁴⁶ Michael McFaul, “Explaining party formation and non-formation in Russia: actors, institutions, and chance”, *Comparative Political Studies*, Volume 34, Issue 10, (2001): 1170

charismatic leader became more important and more appealing than the uncertainty of the programs and values of the newly emerged political parties. The Soviet regime further reinforced this idea of a strong leadership through its hierarchical structure. As a result, after the end of the Communist rule and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian citizens were not yet prepared for the painful process of democratic transition: they did not have sufficient tools (such as experience and knowledge) to make the process smooth and swift. Consequently, the weakness of political parties was the result of this socio-political situation.

CHAPTER III. THE FIRST DECADE OF POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION

The most serious threat to democracy is the notion that it has already been achieved.

3.1 Stages of Party Formation: an Overview

Party system formation and development is a long and complicated process, which depends upon a constitutional structure, values and interests of the people as well as socio-political conditions in the state. However, the process of party system formation in post-communist Eastern Europe and Russia is very different from that in the Western world. In the Western European countries, Canada and the U.S. the process of party system formation was slow and gradual. It was a product of evolutionary changes in the state structures and the attitudes held in the society, which gradually produced stable parties with clearly defined programs and electoral base. In contrast, in most of post-communist countries of Eastern Europe and in Russia, political parties emerged within a very short period of time and their initial goal was primarily to act as an opposition force to the repressive rule of the Communist party. This process of party system creation could be divided into several stages. For example, Hutcheson identifies four major periods of party system formations which the countries of the third wave of democratization in Eastern Europe are going through.⁴⁷ The first stage can be identified as a reactionary stage to the old regime. During this stage a change in the thinking of the elite as well as the society occurs. Many segments of the

⁴⁷ Daniel Hutcheson, *Political Parties in the Russian Regions*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 10-19

society acknowledged the tremendous need for change in the continuous, chronic ineffectiveness and backwardness of the state system and experienced a general disillusionment with the old regime and its values. During this period, the emerging opposition to the current regime is not yet consolidated or well-structured; rather, it is represented in formation of vague discussion groups, political movements and growing ideological fragmentation within the society and the party itself. This period in Russia is exemplified by the circumstances of the 1980's.

The second stage generally begins with the official fall of the dominant party and collapse of the regime. The number of political parties during this time mushrooms, but their values, goals and programs are weakly defined, and such programs are predominantly based on short-term appeals.⁴⁸ Also, this period is characterized by frequent coalition making, fluidity and unpredictability in the party structure, and constant creation and breakdown of parties. In Russia, this period lasted from approximately 1990 to the first election in 1993. It was marked by a power struggle between the President, Boris Yeltsin and the Parliament, which was violently dissolved by the President in October of 1993. The first parliamentary elections to the State Duma were held in December of that year.

The next stage in the development of party system began in 1993 and, as Hutcheson argues, ended in 2002. This period involves the actual formation and stabilization of the party system, characterized by establishment of stable parties and formation of party identity among population. However, it is arguable that the creation of a multiparty system is complete in Russia, especially in the context of

⁴⁸ Hutcheson, 11

the strengthening of pro-presidential party and the continuous weakening of the opposition blocs in the government. This period began with the establishment of parties having more defined, better structured, and more or less stable electorate groups. A small number of these political parties demonstrated popular support by winning continuously seats in the State Duma in 1993, 1995, 1999, and 2003 elections. Among them are the most prominent parties and blocs: the Communist party of the Russian Federation, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and Yabloko⁴⁹.

On the other hand, new parties and blocs continue to emerge. Creation and registration in December 2001 of United Russia demonstrated a shift in the focus and orientation of party politics. In particular, United Russia was founded on the basis of the personalized politics of President Putin and connects and mobilizes solidarity of its followers through identification and support for the President rather than a common program, ideological direction, or policies. In a short span of 6 years, United Russia was able to establish itself as the largest and highly popular with general public party. Currently it holds 222 out of 450 seats in the State Duma and it was able to significantly increase its electorate base and strengthen its power, especially over the last couple of years (2006-2007). In the recent elections in the Moscow state Duma (held on December 4, 2005), United Russia received just over 47% of votes, indicating strong support for this relatively young party.

⁴⁹ Yabloko (Russian: Яблоко - Apple) - the name of the party was formed from the acronyms of the names of its founders (Ya- Grigory Yavlinsky, B - Yuri Boldyrev, and L - Vladimir Lukin).

Another recently established political party - the Just Russia - was created as the result of the merge between the Party of Life, Fatherland, and the Party of Pensioners in November 2006. Just Russia appeals to a broader spectrum of electorate on the centre-left of the political spectrum, especially those who in general support the policies of the current government, but seek greater social justice, particularly for poorer and more socially vulnerable segments of the population. As it will be discussed later in the thesis, Just Russia is simply an additional political instrument of the Putin regime, designed to incorporate voters who were not comfortable with United Russia.

Many commentators suggested that the re-emergence of Democratic Party of Russia under the leadership of former Prime Minister M. Kasyanov (which was endorsed by ex-President Yeltsin during his first years in politics) together with the democratic party Our Choice (leader – Khakamada) is another example of the continuous evolution of political parties in Russia.⁵⁰ Whether the main goal of the revival of these parties was to ensure their successful registration under the new law, or it was amounted to an ideological step by those in the opposition, is still to be determined. As mentioned above, the creation of the new parties demonstrates that political parties continue to evolve and the party system is neither completed nor stable at this point.

The fourth and final stage of the party formation process is the consolidation of the created structure, a process that is closely connected to the dynamics of political structures. Russia's party system does not yet have "a stable pattern of

⁵⁰ Elena Rudneva. "Ex-party," *Vedomosti*, (December 6, 2005)

inter-party relationships,"⁵¹ but there is a high degree of continuity and predictability of cooperation and coalition building among Russian parties, even though, as in any democratic state, new political parties continue to emerge. While a number of relatively strong new political parties had been created in the last several years, there are core political parties in the Duma which existed (and participated in elections) since the early 1990's.

Overall, while the Russian political structure accepted the general framework of a multiparty system and established several core political parties, the consolidation of this system is certainly not yet complete. For example, the constant rise and fall of party groupings remains highly fluid, and the frequent alternation of leadership continues up to the present day. The emergence of new party blocs and individual parties, including United Russia and Just Russia among others, demonstrates that this party-building process continues. It slowed down its pace, but the current party structure cannot yet be considered as an established and stable party system, especially considering the remarkable success of the newly created political parties.

3.2 Transition from Communism: the First Years

The collapse of Communist Party rule after being in power for seven decades was a result of the complex interplay of social, political and economic factors. In particular, economic stagnation during the 1970's and 1980's put significant pressure on the government to seek alternatives to their economic policies. The pressure continued to grow during the first years of the 1980's as

⁵¹ Hutcheson, 11

the party elite was growing older and more reluctant to pursue reforms. At the same time, the increasing social and political consciousness created an environment for political activism and pluralism in the Soviet Union, increasing the pressure on the government to reform the weakening state structure. However, it was not until M.S. Gorbachev came to power in 1985 that the process of fundamental transition from communism to democracy commenced.

The personality of Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev played a substantial role in the transition from communism, and had a critical influence on party development in Russia. M.S. Gorbachev's rise to power began in the late 1970's: he became the Secretary of the Central Committee in 1978, and in 1980 he was a full member of the Politburo (the main governmental apparatus).⁵² After the death of K.U. Chernenko in 1985, Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the CPSU and the leader of the country. Being much younger than his predecessors and well-travelled to the West, he was more open to new ideas and recognized the necessity of reforms both within the Party and within the Soviet Union. Gorbachev immediately began to prepare ground for the reforms by removing old-regime supporters and endorsing those who were supporting a more liberalized approach to policies.⁵³ However, in the 1980's Gorbachev's goal was not to diminish the power of the CPSU or dismantle its underlying foundation, but to introduce a new, reformed Party ideology which would correspond to the changes in the Eastern Europe and the rest of the world. Gorbachev was not an advocate of party pluralism – which was still several years

⁵² Remington, *Politics in Russia*, 40

⁵³ *ibid.*

ahead – but it became an unintended consequence of the reforms he launched. The reform was aimed at the creation of ‘socialism with a human face’ within the framework of Marxist-Leninist principles.⁵⁴ In his interview in 2000, M.S.

Gorbachev said:

“There was only one Party, everyone joined the same party. [...] A lot of time still had to pass before I began to understand what the purpose and nature of the Party slogans really were, and what real life was, and what the Party meant for the country. And that the Party, which I had joined, itself badly needed to be reformed and reoriented toward democracy. And through this, the country could begin to gain some freedom. That came later, but it all started with the desire to do something and show initiative. That was what led many good people to join the Komsomol and the Party.”⁵⁵

The two main aspects of the reform became especially well known: *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness). They served as a foundation for partial and gradual liberalization of the economy, loosening of the bureaucratic controls, separating judicial power from the Party, and allowed for more political and social freedom (such as permitting creation of political and social organizations and associations).⁵⁶

However, while a number of fundamental changes were introduced into the system by 1988, Gorbachev was not yet prepared for establishment of a multiparty system in the Soviet Union. According to Remington, Gorbachev allowed partial political liberalization to promote reform within the Party and gain more support among its members in order to provide an arena for greater political

⁵⁴ Michael Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 2),” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 6 Issue 4 (2004): 6

⁵⁵ Interview with M.S. Gorbachev, October 2000, published at <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/gor0int-1>

⁵⁶ Remington, 41

participation.⁵⁷ However, the opposition forces were able to use expanded space for pluralism to their advantage by developing and consolidating their movements.⁵⁸

At the same time as Gorbachev came to power, changes began to take place in the society as well. Numerous non-political organizations began to emerge in the Soviet Union in the early 1980's and their number began to grow exponentially with the introduction of *glasnost*' (openness, transparency) policy by Gorbachev in 1985. Vera Tolz in her book "The USSR's Emerging Multiparty System" provides a valuable analysis of the first unofficial organizations in the Soviet Union in the period preceding the 1991 events. She notes that the majority of these first unofficial groups in 1986-1987 were organized around common everyday interests such as music ensembles, literary clubs, and sport clubs rather than around common political values and goals.⁵⁹ The role of the first unofficial publishing associations (*samizdat*) was proved indispensable, and it served as the first forum for discussion where politically conscious writers, professionals and others were able to voice their opinions. These organizations began to surface rapidly in 1986-1987, gaining more popularity and becoming more active in socio-political life outside of the CPSU. The first conference of the unofficial groups in the USSR was held in Moscow in August 1987.⁶⁰ This event signified a major shift in the Soviet political climate and the outlook of the Soviet elite, represented by Gorbachev and his closest advisors.

⁵⁷ Remington., 42

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Vera Tolz, *The USSR's Emerging Multiparty System*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies; New York: Praeger, 1990), 10-16

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

Thus, pluralism first emerged in Soviet Union as *social* rather than *political* phenomenon. The lid was lifted from the boiling pot of social and political dissatisfaction in the society and the internal democratization of the Communist Party was not sufficient for the growing pluralist appetite.⁶¹ Gorbachev's attempt to reform the party and the system from within failed due to strong criticisms and the growing political activism of pro-democratic groups. These newly emerged democratic activists no longer believed that the system could be reformed from within and sought to change it through reform of main political institutions and procedures such as elections.⁶² The process of reform was gaining both the speed and the intensity. In February 1990, a major step was made towards creation of a multiparty system: Article 6 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution (which proclaimed the CPSU as "the leading and guiding force of the Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organizations and public organizations"⁶³) was repealed, finally legalizing the creation of political parties. That event was a major catalyst for further consolidation of Russia's democratic forces and its growing influence on the political arena.

The first self-proclaimed opposition party was created by several unofficial groups in 1988 under the name of the Democratic Union, and was led by now disenchanted Boris Yeltsin (who at the time was forced outside of Gorbachev inner circle after having criticized Gorbachev and the direction of perestroika

⁶¹ Michele A. Weigle, "Political Participation and Party Formation in Russia, 1985-1992: Institutionalizing Democracy", *Russian Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (April 1994), 247

⁶² Michael McFaul, *Post-Communist Politics: Democratic Prospects in Russia and Eastern Europe*, CSIS series, (1993), 38-39

⁶³ Stephen White, *Russia's New Politics: the Management of a Postcommunist Society*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36

policy).⁶⁴ In 1990, a number of other political parties were created (including the Social Democratic Party of Russia, the Republican Party of Russia and a number of other Christian democratic and constitutional democratic parties), but none of them played a significant role in the early process of transition.⁶⁵ As already mentioned, these newly emerged political parties and organizations were loosely organized mainly around common socio- political ideas with such concepts as democracy, reform and representation dominating their agenda. Thus, during the period between 1991 and 1993, the Russian political landscape was dominated by two opposite forces: the supporters of the Communists and the new democrats. However, this struggle between the past and the future was a difficult one as the political and governmental system built by the CPSU was deeply engraved into all aspects of social, economic and political life. The relationship between Yelstin and Gorbachev during these first years of reforms was a clear illustration of the complexities (ideological as well structural) that characterized the initial stages of transition.

The relations between Yeltsin and Gorbachev during the period of 1987-1991 played a crucial role in the process of reformation of political system in Russia. In one of the most intricate studies of these two leaders, George Breslauer discusses the importance of these two personalities on the course of reforms and the future of the Russian Federation.⁶⁶ Elected to the People's Congress of Deputies in 1991, and, subsequently, as the first President of the

⁶⁴ Tolz, 56

⁶⁵ McFaul (1993),43

⁶⁶ see George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Russian Federation in 1991, Boris Yeltsin gained significant authority and popularity in his first comeback years in power mainly due to his initially strong pro-democratic vision of Russia. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, he was not able to form a strong democratic party organization because of the fragmentation among the democratic forces, and also because of his political preferences for strong state executive rather than party system. In fact, according to Breslauer, during his ascendancy to the political arena, Yeltsin was not committed to building a strong representative party system or working on creation of a constitutional structure with clear separation of powers; rather, he was focused on super-presidentialism, populism and a strong central power.⁶⁷ His program for action was strongly anti- Communist, anti-corruption and anti-Gorbachev.⁶⁸ Thus, party development was not at the top of Yeltsin political agenda.

The first steps towards institutionalization of genuine legislative procedures began during the 1990 election campaign for the RSFSR (The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) First Congress of People's Deputies. These elections were a result of the institutional restructuring of the Soviet Union, and the resulting greater autonomy of the republics. The Democratic Russia bloc (which consisted of Yeltsin's supporters) performed relatively well, taking between 30 and 40 percent of the vote.⁶⁹ However, the division of seats in the new Parliament reflected the bipolar (conservatives and

⁶⁷ Breslauer, 171-172

⁶⁸ Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 612

⁶⁹ Thomas Remington, *The Russian Parliament: Institutional Evolution in a Transitional Regime, 1989-1999*, (Yale Univerisy Press, New Haven & London, 2001), 91

reformers) structure of the Russian political landscape. While a relatively large number of democratically oriented candidates were elected, overall support for Democratic Russia, although quite wide, was shallow.⁷⁰

In 1993, Yeltsin realized a pressing need to call for national legislative elections in order to gain more legitimacy both within the executive and the legislative branches of power. The period leading to the first post-Soviet parliamentary elections in Russia was marked by political as well as social and economic crisis. The legislative body (the Congress of People's Deputies) still consisted of a large number of Communists, though Yeltsin appointed an increasing number of reformers to his staff. The transition, which began to acquire an increasing momentum, included a number of complex socio-political and economic reforms, which coincided with the process of internal social and ideological evolution of the society. Tired of the economic stagnation and political chaos in the country, people were looking for stability, order and accountability promised by the Yeltsin administration. However, large segments of the government and the population were dissatisfied with the harsh effects of a major transitional recession and the framework of growing super-presidentialism practiced by Yeltsin. After over a year of institutional civil war between the executive and the legislature, the situation culminated in the fall of 1993 with military coup in Moscow. Yeltsin issued a decree to dissolve the Parliament on September 21, 1993, but the Deputies refused to leave the White House (the Parliament). During October 2-4, Deputies refused to leave the White House, and they were supported by various segments of the population that were dissatisfied

⁷⁰ Remington (2001), 91.

with the radical nature of reforms and strong presidential power. On October 4th, after 2 days of stalemate between the Deputies and the Government, the Army succeeded in bringing down the uprising, wounding and killing over 400 according to the lowest estimates.

The parliamentary elections to the Russian State Duma were called for December 12th, 1993. The new electoral system proposed by Yeltsin and his supporters had been approved in September 1993. Under the new electoral law, the Russian State Duma (lower chamber of the legislature) would consist of 450 deputies; half of them elected through party lists, and half are elected in the single mandate districts. In order to gain seats in the legislature, a party would have to gain at least 5% of the total vote. This electoral design was aimed at the promotion of a stronger multiparty system by electing deputies on party lists while giving sufficient representation to the regions through mandates.

CHAPTER IV. THE CHALLENGE OF STATE DUMA ELECTIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.
Alice Walker

Elections present a valuable source of indicators for analysis of party system development. During the first decade of transition, three national legislative elections were held: December 12, 1993; December 17, 1995; December 19, 1999. This section will compare the outcomes of these elections and their role in the establishment of the party system in post- Soviet Russia.

4.1 The 1993 State Duma Elections

The elections of 1993 proved to be a serious test to the readiness of the Russian people for democracy. The first parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation after the collapse of communism took place on December 12, 1993 and combined two major political issues: the election of legislators into the lower chamber of the Russian Parliament (the State Duma) and the referendum on the new Russian Constitution. As Dahl notes, the elections took place within a very complicated set of events such as the dissolution of the USSR, the disintegration of the state-controlled economy, and the political standoff between the President and the Parliament in the months prior to the elections.⁷¹ Political parties only began to take shape and were going through a learning process of effective functioning in a democratic political system. Most of the parties were created

⁷¹ Robert Dahl, "Russia's 1993 Parliamentary elections: a challenging test to democracy", *Voting and Democracy report 1993*, <http://www.fairvote.org/reports/1993/dahl.html>

shortly before the electoral campaign and, therefore, did not have developed party programs, internal party structure or electoral base. Thus, the elections became a serious test for the ability of the political parties to survive in the process of post-communist transition and development of a strong, consolidated, and representative party system.

The socio-political situation prior to the 1993 elections was marked by chaos, instability and unpredictability. Dahl argues that the bipolar political structure (the Communists and the Democrats) came to an end after the 1991 August coup, and a greater variety of political organizations emerged.⁷² Thus, further political fragmentation began to take place in the government as well as in the society. After the 1993 October crisis, party formation became even more chaotic.⁷³ During this time of preparation for the December elections, an active stage of party creation and consolidation began. By September 1993, there were 37 political parties and over 2000 public organizations that registered with the Central Electoral Committee; of them, only 13 'electoral associations' were able to fulfill all the requirements for electoral nominations and were allowed to proceed.⁷⁴ As a result of the elections, 8 parties succeeded in winning seats in the Duma.

The political parties elected to the State Duma could be separated into three main groups: reformist, centrist and extremist (included nationalist and neo-

⁷² Michel McFaul, *Post-Communist Politics: Democratic Prospects in Russia and Eastern Europe*, CSIS series, p. 63

⁷³ Sakwa, 1995:207

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 199

communist parties).⁷⁵ The first group consisted of Russia's Choice, Yavlinsky-Boldyrev-Lukin bloc, Party of Russian Unity and Concord (PRES), and the Movement for Democratic Reform (RDDR). Centrist parties included Civic Union and Democratic Party of Russia. The last group – the extremist - consisted of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the Liberal Democratic Party. The relatively even spread of votes across the political spectrum suggests that a genuine multiparty system was finally emerging in Russia.⁷⁶

Those political parties that were elected in the Duma represented a relatively wide spectrum of political interests and values. However, there were a number of problems within the political parties, which consequently undermined their ability to remain on the political arena. One of the major problems encountered by the nascent political parties during the first years of transition was their internal structural weakness and a lack of ability to build viable coalitions. For example, Russia's Choice (a party led by liberal Westernizer, First Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar; it supported rapid liberalization and democratization of the country) was initially a coalition of several major political organizations/parties (Russia Democratic Movement, Democratic Initiative, the Peasant Party of Russia and the Russia's Choice itself). However, it failed to unite radical democratic forces, and consequently split into 4 blocs demonstrating inability of the democratic movements to work together in the government.⁷⁷ Also, while Russia's Choice had sufficient access to the state resources in the months leading to the elections

⁷⁵ Joseph L. Noguee and R. Judson Mitchell, *Russian Politics: The Struggle for a New Order*, (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 117

⁷⁶ see Table 1, State Duma Elections 1993

⁷⁷ Sakwa (1995), 200

(such as media coverage, regional networks, etc.), its campaign was clumsy and inappropriate, appealing to middle class values in a country with a negligible middle class.⁷⁸ Other centrists and reformist parties also failed to gain sufficient support in the elections, all of them winning less than 10% of the total seats in the Duma.

The Liberal Democratic Party led by the rather flamboyant leader Vladimir Volfovich Zhirinovskiy succeeded mainly on the grounds of strong pro-Russian rhetoric, blaming the government for deteriorating living conditions, disintegration of unity and collapse of the economy in the first years of transition. This party was able to win 64 (14.2%) seats in the Duma by appealing to those who regretted the waning power of the Russian state after 1991 as well as lack of economic and social stability.

The Communist Party also performed relatively well, taking 10% of the total seats in the Duma. This success was mainly built on the existing bureaucratic regional networks as well as nostalgia of the older, poorer segments of the population.

Analyzing the results of this election, several conclusions emerge. First, democratic parties (both reformist and centrist) were too fragmented in their campaign and failed to unite for the election. The attempt to create a 'party of power' was relatively successful: Russia's Choice took 15% of the seats in the newly elected Duma. However, this party was created from the top as a tool of uniting pro-government forces for the new election. Russia's Choice lacked

⁷⁸ Sakwa (1995), 200

strong internal structure, common developed program and stable electoral base, and, as a result, it dissolved shortly thereafter into several blocs.

Secondly, a clear success of the extremist/nationalist/neo-communist parties was a result of active mobilization of the electorate and the program that appealed to the needs of people affected by the harshness of rapid economic decline and social disarray in the first two years of independence. In particular, the success of V.V. Zhirinovskiy (LDPR) was a result of his strong populist image, appeal to those who suffered from declining living conditions and the emerging strong nationalistic elements in the society.⁷⁹ The success of the Communist Party, on the other hand, was a result of their internal organization and structure as well as their ability to mobilize large segments of population in the regions. In fact, according to Sakwa, the CPSU was the only genuine party at that time (with organizational networks in the regions and strong internal structure).⁸⁰

Third, as a result of growing dissatisfaction with the reforms and the growing power of the President in the absence of an effective and representative legislative body, voters were skeptical of further reforms and were more likely to support parties that were focused on creating constitutional order, ensuring social and economic stability and which were led by strong and charismatic personalities that would be able to address the socio-economic crisis of the early 1990's. These attitudes were reflected in the relatively high percentage of votes cast for the extremist/nationalist political parties.

⁷⁹ Sakwa(1995), 119.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 120

Also, the proportion of elected independents on the constituency ballot was impressive: they became the largest group elected in the single mandate districts, taking 141 out of 225 seats on party list.⁸¹ There are several factors that could explain this situation. First, the electorate grew even more disenchanted with the idea of political parties (including those that promised change and reform), thereby undermining the role of political parties as representative agents in the post-communist Russia. Secondly, the personality of the nominees seemed to play a more important role than their political affiliation, indicating the poor relationship between the political parties and the society.

Another major conclusion derived from the December 1993 elections was a heightened sense of skepticism towards the political parties and a multiparty system in general. The attitudes of the majority of population towards political parties were based on feelings of mistrust, lack of connection between people's needs and parties' promises, as well as inability of the political parties to become effective and active representatives of the voters in the government. In fact, according to McAllister and White, during the initial five years of transition, the majority of voters supported either a one party system or a multiparty system with fewer parties than existed at the time of their interviewing.⁸² However, despite the skepticism and wary attitudes regarding the ability of the political parties to perform their duties, the 1993 elections results suggest that voters were able to take the advantage of the party pluralism, electing 8 out 13 parties on the ballot.

⁸¹ White (2000), 38

⁸² Ian McAllister and Stephen White, "To Vote or Not to Vote: Election Turnout in Post-communist Russia", in ed. *Elections and Voters in Post-Communist Russia*, (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Pub., 1998), 36

4.2 *The 1995 State Duma Elections*

The second national parliamentary election was scheduled for December 17, 1995, two years after the first Duma was elected⁸³. In the 1995 Duma elections, 43 parties contested 225 seats available through the party list ballot. The December 1995 Duma elections once again demonstrated the prolonged weakness of political party system in Russia. Only three of the eight political parties elected in the State Duma in 1993 passed the 5% threshold (CPRF, LDPR and Yabloko) in December 1995, and only four political parties were able to gain enough votes to get seats in the State Duma, including the newly created in the spring of 1995 pro-government party Our Home Russia.

The results of the 1995 elections demonstrated dynamics similar to those produced in the 1993 elections. As Belin and Orttung note that two of the four parties elected relied heavily on the charismatic authority of their leaders (Yabloko led by G. Yavlinsky and LDPR led by V. Zhirinovsky).⁸⁴ The liberal Yabloko was able to get only 7% of the PR votes, but performed much better on the SMD list, increasing the number of their party members in the Duma from 23 in 1993 to 45 in 1995. The nationalist LDPR experienced a major decline from the previous elections: it got only 11% of the PR vote in 1995, comparing to almost 23% in 1993 election. Our Home Russia, as already mentioned, was created just before the election campaign as a pro-government party. While supported by much the regional elite, Belin and Orttung rightfully predicted the demise of this

⁸³ The 1993 Russian State Duma was elected for a 2-year term. The subsequent Dumas would serve a four year term.

⁸⁴ Laura Belin and Robert Orttung with R. S. Clem and P. R. Craumer, *The Russian Parliamentary Elections of 1995: the Battle for the Duma*, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 160

political party after the elections as it happened with the Russia's Democratic Choice party in 1993.⁸⁵

The success of the Communist Party was again a result of its solid and well organized internal structure, party networks in the regions and the successful electoral campaign. Overall, communists won almost one-third of the vote, which indicated a significant improvement in their ability to reform the party and appeal to the needs and interests of their supporters despite the image of the CPSU. Other political parties on the left side of the political spectrum also performed relatively well. They included Agrarian Party with 20 seats (won in the SMD), and Power to the People with 9 seats (won in the SMD), which further strengthened the pro-communist bloc in the Russian State Duma in 1995.

The results of the 1995 Duma elections indicated a number of important developments in the party system transition. First, the number of political parties participating in the elections was significantly higher than two years ago: 43 political parties in 1995 compared to 13 in 1993. However, the number of parties elected to the State Duma was twice smaller in 1995. This leads to the conclusion that while a greater number of political parties were able to pass the requirements for the registration and participation in the election, they failed to produce a coherent and appealing program for the electorate. The electorate became even more skeptical of the political parties as agents of democratization, and these attitudes were partially reflected in the growing reminiscent support for the CPSU.

⁸⁵ Belin and Orttung, 161

The results of this election also indicate that the Russian voters became disillusioned with the new course of reforms, especially the economic 'shock therapy' implemented by the government. The first years of transition resulted in the decline of living conditions, escalating corruption rates, and lack of social and economic stability. Consequently, the Russian voters responded to this prolonged crisis by casting more than 20% of votes for the CPSU, with pro-democratic parties receiving 10% or less of the vote. The LDPR was also able to strengthen its position in the Duma by strong pro-nationalist appeals, emphasizing importance of strong nationhood, unity, and pride along with importance of social stability and welfare.

These elections demonstrated that the political parties remained weak in Russia in 1995. The results were often characterized as nostalgic, reminiscent of the past stability and skeptical of the new reforms initiated by the government. Nevertheless, the party system began to take roots in the society by winning support of the electorate: three out of four parties elected were elected to the Duma in the previous parliamentary election in 1993, demonstrating continuity of these parties. Also, the political spectrum began to consolidate and vote distribution was relatively equally spread along three groups of parties (the reformist and pro-government parties won 31%, the communist group won 32% and the nationalists won 20%).⁸⁶ However, half of the party list votes were wasted on the parties that did not cross the 5% barrier, significantly undermining the

⁸⁶ Belin and Orttung, 162

representativeness of the Second Duma and indicating low levels of association and trust towards political parties as democratic agents.⁸⁷

The results of this election were reflective of several major developments in the Russian political life. In particular, as a result of the 'shock therapy' (rapid liberalization of the economy) socio-economic conditions continued to decline affecting living standards of the majority of the population. Secondly, Yeltsin continued to consolidate his presidential power at the expense of the legislature, undermining representativeness, accountability, and effectiveness of the Duma. Thirdly, the rise of the oligarchs' power in political affairs further destabilized an already weak relationship between the executive, the legislature and the electorate. As a result, the majority of voters in December 1995 were focused on parties with clearly defined programs and goals (rather than those focused around interest groups) as well as those promoting responsibility, national pride and unity.

4.3 The 1999 State Duma Elections

The 1999 Duma elections played a crucial role for the formation of the party system in the next several years. Several developments in the political life of Russia were especially important. First, the appearance of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin on the federal political arena changed the course of Russian post-communist transition and marked a new stage in the evolution of the party system. Second, the division of powers in the 1999 Duma significantly differed from any of the previous Dumas: two major (yet on the opposite ends of the

⁸⁷ Belin and Orttung, 163

political spectrum) political parties - CPRF and Unity - gained almost equal number of votes on the party list ballot, while liberal and nationalist parties performed relatively poor, failing to get more 10% of the vote.⁸⁸ Third, the 1999 Duma election was considered by many as a rehearsal of the Presidential election which was held in March of 2000, and thus there was additional pressure on the presidential administration and the major political parties. As a result, the political parties which were elected in the 1999 Duma reflected the complex distribution of powers in the government and signified a shift in the political preferences of the voters as well as the evolution of the party system.

Of the 43 political parties participating in 1995 election, 35 did not compete in the 1999 Duma elections.⁸⁹ Once again, the government attempted to create a party of power. This time, two major political parties emerged representing centrist position on the political spectrum: the Fatherland – All Russia and Unity. Both parties were based around personalities familiar to the electorate: the latter was represented by Primakov and Luzhkov and the latter by Prime Minister Putin. Together these two parties were able to take just over 30% of the seats, but at the time of the first Duma session after election a number of deputies who run as independents joined the Unity party, significantly strengthening its position in the parliament.

Another political party was created in 1999 which was able to surpass the 5% threshold – the Union of Right Forces (SPS, an electoral bloc led by former Prime Minister Kirienko). The SPS was a product of bringing together several

⁸⁸ see Table 3, State Duma Election Results 1999

⁸⁹ Richard Rose, Neil Munro & Stephen White, "Voting in a Floating Party System: the 1999 Duma Election," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (May 2001), 423

liberal factions, including the members of Gaidar's party - Russia's Democratic Choice. The party included a number of very prominent political figures such as B. Nemtsov, I. Khakamada, Y. Gaidar, S. Kirienko, and A. Chubais among others. Its program was based on such goals as forming a strong, law-based state, promote establishment of the civil society, and liberalization of the economy. This party would continue to be an important electoral bloc in the government in the next several years, strengthening its role as a liberal opposition to the government.

The results of the election indicated a new stage in the party development process. One trend continued to be persistent in this election as in the 1993 and 1995 elections: the number of independents that won seats on the SMD ballot was higher than any other political party with 119 seats out of 225. According to Rose, White and Munro the major failures was a lack of nominations by political parties in the single member district voting list.⁹⁰ This indicates that the political parties continued to have poor regional connections, failing to solidify their position through SMD seats.

However, in the 1999 election, the political parties were able to better mobilize the Russian population: in contrast with the previous election, the majority of the votes went to the political parties that were elected in the Duma: only 18.7% of votes went to the parties that did not clear the 5% barrier.⁹¹

This election demonstrated a shift in the voting preferences of the Russian electorate as well as consolidation of party system trends in Russia. In particular,

⁹⁰ Rose, Munro & White, pp. 420-423

⁹¹ *ibid.*

a clear decline in the popularity of the LDPR and the Communist party was indicating that extremist/nationalist sentiments were no longer supported by the majority of the population, and the general public was leaning towards parties with more centrist and coherent program, which promoted law, stability and gradual reform. As a result, the Unity was able to emerged as a clear winner, taking the position of the 'party of power' and successfully consolidating its position by attracting a number of the independents after the election. The major theme from which Unity (which would later become United Russia) benefited in the election was a growing need of the Russian people for stability - social, political, and economic. The hardships of the first eight years of transition culminated with the collapse of the economy in August 1998, and the escalating conflict in Chechnya among other eminent problems. Putin's new policy direction (which was focused, harsh on crime and aimed at stability) was backed up by the Unity's rhetoric in the electoral campaign, preparing the ground for the presidential elections four month after the 1999 Duma elections.

4.4 The 2003 State Duma Elections

The 2003 elections to the Russian State Duma marked a new stage in the process of democratic transition. The political landscape significantly changed as a result of President Putin's policies, including the reorganization of the federal divisions (creation of 7 federal *okrugs*), reform of the Federal Council and a number of other social and political reforms. As a result, Russia emerged for the 2003 elections more centralized and stable but less pluralist and democratic. Old political parties were tested by the new law on political parties, which required a

much wider support and membership. At the same time, the new party of power – United Russia – was able to significantly improve its positions, mobilizing very diverse social groups and benefiting from close association with the popular President. As a result, the outcome of the December 2003 federal parliamentary election was less than unexpected.

Only four political parties were able to surpass the 5% threshold: United Russia, Communist Party, LDPR and Motherland (Rodina). None of the liberal political parties were able to reach the necessary percentage of votes, and did not get elected to the Duma on the party lists. The United Russia received a sweeping victory, taking 222 out of 450 seats in the Duma. Their performance was equally impressive both on the party list and in the single-member district list, with 120 and 102 seats, respectively. The Communist Party gained 52 seats, representing 11.6% of the new Duma. LDPR's results were slightly worse than those of CPRF: they got 36 seats (8%), none of which were won in the SMD. Motherland received 37 (8.2%) seats in the Duma, which was a relatively impressive performance given its short life on the political arena.

One of the key results of the 2003 election was that neither of the pro-Western liberal political parties was able to pass the 5% threshold. The support for the Union of the Right Forces and Yabloko continued to decline since 1999, and by the 2003 December elections these parties lost about half of its electorate.⁹² As a result, SPS was able to get a mere 4.0% of the vote on the party list, and Yabloko received 4.3% of the PR vote. While both received seats on the SMD list (Yabloko – 4 seats, SPS – 3 seats), together they represented

⁹² Yuri Levada, "What the Polls Tell Us," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, Issue 3 (2004), 49

only 1.6% of the Duma deputies, failing to become a substantial opposition force in the Duma. The reasons behind such failure of the liberal bloc included “tactical, organizational and political mistakes, including the parties’ failure to join forces during the campaign”.⁹³ Also, these parties continuously expressed their discontent with the government’s policies generally supported by the population and that could have also played a role in the decline of support for the liberal parties. McFaul and Petrov explain: “If the incumbent is popular, it is not surprising that those challenging the status quo would perform poorly at the ballot box.”⁹⁴

Zhirinovsky’s LDPR improved its position in the Duma by winning 8% of the total seats in the Duma, doubling its share of seats since the previous elections. However, despite the improvement in their overall performance, LDPR continued to be a quasi- opposition party. According to Levada, “the LDPR is a completely artificial entity, which manages to gather the potential for social protest and transform it into support for the party of power. The LDPR acts as a useful foil, routinely taking extreme positions that allow United Russia to posture as a paragon of stability and centrist respectability. Now, however, the ruling party has such a lock on the Duma that Zhirinovsky and his faction seem hardly needed.”⁹⁵

Another political party that was able to pass the threshold and get elected in the Duma on the party list was Motherland bloc (Rodina). The party was

⁹³ Levada, 49

⁹⁴ Michael McFaul and Nikolai Petrov, “What the Elections Tell Us”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15 Issue 3 (2004), 23

⁹⁵ Levada, 49

created only three and a half months before the election and was designed to attract support of the voters on the left of political spectrum, including those who supported CPRF. It had been argued by some analysts that the new bloc was an artificially created opposition in the government and the majority are highly skeptical of its future viability.⁹⁶

The results of the 2003 Duma elections indicated a number of new developments in the party system. First, the new party of power – United Russia – emerged and it is growing increasingly stronger, consolidating its position in the state institutions and mobilizing various social groups as its supporters. United Russia did not suffer the fate of the previous parties of power, which as mentioned previously dissolved shortly after elections. On the contrary, United Russia was able to build an ever stronger institutional as well as electoral base by supporting a very popular President and his policies and employing extensive state resources (such as influence of the Presidential administration and control of the media) for its campaign.

Second, the 2003 elections demonstrated a weakening opposition and fading party pluralism. The two major liberal parties (SPS and Yabloko) were once again unable to overcome their internal differences, failing to get any seats on the party list. The Communist Party also lost a significant number of seats, going down from 113 seats in the 1999 Duma to 52 in the 2003. All three of the opposition parties performed poorly as a result of their inability to build strong and relatively stable electoral base, weak internal party structure, and failure to

⁹⁶ William Clark, "Russia at the Polls: Potemkin Democracy", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 51 No. 2, March/April (2004), 25

connect with the voters due to vagueness of their programs. Also, as McFaul and Petrov mention, poor campaigning and ill-defined promises further attributed to poor performance of the CPRF, Yabloko and SPS.⁹⁷

Third, the results indicated that there is a clear tendency towards fewer political parties in the government. Out of 23 political parties on the ballot, only four parties were able to pass the five percent threshold (United Russia, CPRF, LDPR and Motherland), and almost half of the seats were taken by one party – United Russia. What were the factors that attributed to such concentration of votes and the decline of the parties elected to the Duma? One of the reasons is various policies and reforms implemented by President Putin during his first term, namely the federal reorganization reform, the new law on political parties, and the Federal Council reform. All of these new policies were aimed at increasing federal control of the regional politics and elimination of shallow party pluralism (those political parties that did not have sufficient representation on the local level and were based on short-term interests and appeals).

4.5 The ‘Party of Power’ During the First Decade of Transition

Interesting is the fate of those political parties which participated in the elections from 1991 to 1999 as the “parties of power.” Among them are Russia’s Choice, Our Home Russia and Unity. All three of these parties represented a centrist position on the political spectrum with liberal, reform-oriented programs. Their members included a number of prominent political leaders (Chernomyrdin,

⁹⁷ McFaul and Petrov, 23

Chubais, Shoigu, Soskovets, and others), and many of them were occupying major political positions in the government.

Russia's Choice (later re-named Democratic Choice of Russia) was the first 'party of power' after the collapse of the USSR. It emerged as an electoral bloc in 1993 elections, supporting Yeltsin's reforms, liberalization and privatization. The leader of the party became E. Gaidar, the leading politician and economist during Yeltsin period. Democratic Choice of Russia emerged from Russia's Choice after a number of independent deputies joined the party in 1994, winning 15% of the vote. It came to the 1995 parliamentary elections as a coalition of several small reformist political factions. At the moment, the electoral bloc lacked administrative resources, internal strength and, as a result, it failed to pass the threshold in the 1995 elections. The party ceased to exist, joining the Union of Right Forces in the 1999 elections.

The fate of the Our Home Russia was similar. After being established in 1995, the party performed successfully in the elections in December 1995. It became the party of power during 1995-1998, representing bureaucracy and supporting the government.⁹⁸ However, as the political interests and goals of its leaders changes, the party split into several factions. In the parliamentary elections of 1999, Our Home Russia took only 8 seats, all of which joined Unity later all. After the split within the party, the remaining faction Our Home Russia lost its electoral appeal and joined Unity during its party congress in May 2000.

The fate of the United Russia party is likely going to be completely different. In particular, it succeeded on several levels, winning a wide support of

⁹⁸ <http://www.panorama.ru/works/vybory/party/ndr.html>

the electorate and gaining power and control in the State Duma. United Russia currently enjoys over 45% of support among the population, and it is likely to remain at this level after the December 2007 parliamentary election. However, its future success after the presidential election (scheduled for March 2008) would depend largely upon who will be elected as the next president. Since the United Russia is often considered as an institutionalized support group for Putin the legislature, with the change of power in the Kremlin, the future of the party (its role and its necessity) is highly questionable. However, it is too early to discard United Russia as an important political entity – after all, it has the widest popular support and it was able to consolidate its position very significantly at all levels of the government to simply disappear from the political landscape very soon. This position was specifically outlined by Putin's deputy chief of staff and chief political advisor in Kremlin Vladyslav Surkov in his address during the political seminar held by United Russia in 2006:

“Surkov's speech is intended both to outline a social contract between the Russian leadership and the Russian people and to ensure that United Russia continues to enjoy its position as the dominant party in Russian politics. If this social contract is accepted, United Russia will have succeeded in creating an ideological framework for national unity and a road map to national greatness; at the very least, it will have ensured its position as a ruling party until the presidential elections of 2012 or even beyond. This is a greater accomplishment than previous attempts to create a ruling party in post-Communist Russia, such as Russia's Choice (1993) and Our Home Russia (1996).”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ cited in Ariel Cohen, “Putin's Legacy and United Russia New Ideology”, The Heritage Foundation: Leadership for America, (June 1, 2006)
<http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/bg1940.cfm>

The main problem with Surkov's view of the political future of the Russian Federation is that he considers the United Russia to be:

“[...] first of all as an instrument of civil society, as an instrument of societal participation in political life and in power... a self-regulating and non-commercial organization of a completely different kind... an institute of civil society, a self-organization of citizens.”¹⁰⁰

Thus, he refers to the United Russia party as the leading actor in the Russian politics, implicitly questioning the function of other political parties as capable to take on those roles.

This overview of the 'parties of power' demonstrates that political parties reflected a continuous volatility and instability in the party system. In general, these political parties were created specifically for the elections, aggregating interests and promoting programs pursued by the government. Those political parties that supported the government and the President enjoyed significant success during the elections but neither of them was able to remain the leading political party, dissolving shortly before the next election or joining the newly created parties.

¹⁰⁰ Vladislav Surkov, "General'naya Liniya," *Moskovskie Novosti*, No. 7 (1324), March 3–9, 2006, 10–11

CHAPTER V. PUTIN AND THE PARTY SYSTEM: 2000-2007

*In order to become the master, the
politician poses as the servant.
Charles de Gaulle*

The main goal of this chapter is to examine how the change in the government and its policy direction since the end of 1999 affected the development of the party system in Russia. After V.V. Putin came to power (first, as the acting President after Yeltsin's resignation on the New Year's Eve of 1999, and, then, as the popularly elected President in March 2000), the political environmental conditions significantly changed. Russian economy experienced a significant growth, political situation in the conflict-torn regions began to stabilize, and the living conditions of the majority of the Russian population began to change for the better. On the other hand, during the period between 1999 and 2007, the party system experienced a major stagnation in its development. This was the result of several intertwining factors, namely the consolidation of the 'vertical of power', growing mistrust among the general public towards the political parties as representative institutions, as well as the continuing trend of superpresidentialism. This chapter will the factors that undermined the development of the multiparty system in Russia during this period (2000-2007): the personality of V.V. Putin as the president of the Russian Federation (vs. the personality of B. Yeltsin), the centralization and consolidation of the 'vertical of power' in the 'managed democracy' model, the attitudes of the general public towards the political parties, as well as the new generation of the 'parties of power' which emerged in the last seven years (2000-2007). All four factors jointly

explain the dynamics of the party system development since 1999, and provide a number of insights into the future of its development in Russia (discussed in the next chapter).

5.1 The Change of Power in Kremlin: from Yeltsin to Putin

The change of the presidential power on the New Years Eve in 1999 was a significant step not only in the Russian political life, but it also signaled a new stage of democratic transition. Boris Yeltsin left an important imprint on the political system of Russia, and his successor was faced with a difficult task of rehabilitating the system as well as the people, which were affected by the first ten years of harsh transition. The resignation of Boris Yeltsin, the first President of the Russian Federation, demonstrated that the change of political leaders in Russia could be done in a peaceful manner without an apparent violation of the Constitution. However, by resigning before the expiration of his term and naming V.V. Putin as his preferred successor, Yeltsin implemented a strategic plan, which would ensure that his role in the political history of Russia would not be compromised.

What was the legacy of the first Russian President, especially concerning the political structures established in the first ten years of transition and their affect on the nascent party system? First of all, Boris Yeltsin was able to institutionalize and consolidate a strong presidential apparatus, significantly undermining the power of the legislature as well as any other democratic institutions in Russia. His reliance on and the subsequent support of the emerging economic elite in the first years in power gave rise to the oligarchs,

and, consequently, led to their increasing tacit influence on the decision-making processes at the federal and regional level.¹⁰¹ Rampant corruption weakened people's trust into such institutions as the State Duma, police, media, and the political parties among others. As the result, by 1999 the political and economic life in Russia was marked by fraud, suspicion, mistrust and desperate need for stability and security.

Secondly, Yeltsin's regime was characterized by a shadowy system of checks and balances, which compensated for the absence of the effective institutions and allowed Yeltsin to remain connected to various political and business circles.¹⁰² In other words, Yeltsin relied predominantly on the tacit and informal support of the diverse groups rather than attempting to build strong institutionalized representative structures. This system was further reinforced by the artificially created revolutionary cycles, in which the state was in a continuous turmoil of the changing governments and Yeltsin's inner circle.¹⁰³ As the result, Yeltsin was the only constant in the Russian politics during the turbulent period of 1991-1999, and he employed all possible resources to keep it that way. As one analyst put it:

"Yeltsin's actions have never flowed from any kind of commitment to democracy, and they have nurtured neither a democratic culture nor democratic institutions. His primitive understanding of democracy and capitalism as simply the negation

¹⁰¹ For more information on the relationship between B. Yeltsin and the oligarchs, see Olga Kryshantovskaya, *Anatomy of the Russian Elite*, (Solov'yov Publishing, Moscow 2004); David Kotz and Fred Weir, *Russia's path from Gorbachev to Putin: the demise of the Soviet system and the new Russia*. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁰² Lilia Shevtsova, "From Yeltsin to Putin: Evolution of Power", in ed. *Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Putin: Political Leadership in Russia's Transition*, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace October 2001), 82

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 83

of the Communist past has been matched by an overriding, sometimes ruthless, commitment to his own political survival.”¹⁰⁴

Thus, the development of the strong presidential system which was initiated by Yeltsin in the first years of post-communist transition was primarily based upon the interests and goals of the leading political personalities:

“Decisions of self-interest made in an uncertain context produced Russia’s presidential system. These choices initially had little or nothing to do with concerns about party development, but were all about obtaining, and then consolidating, political power through a process that did not require strong parties. Once in place, the presidential system has provided aspirants to the office a path to power that does not require a party affiliation.”¹⁰⁵

President Putin inherited this system, and it worked to his advantage: the constitutionally protected immense powers of the president were further legitimized by the vast support of the electorate gained by Putin during the first months in the office. The creation of a multiparty system was recognized as the necessary attribute of democracy in post-communist Russia, but the constitutional design of the governmental institutions and the allocation of powers provided little incentives for its emergence.

The personality of President Putin is playing an important role in the process of transition, which subsequently shapes the direction of party system evolution. Unlike Yeltsin, Putin has an unprecedented level of trust, which is currently around 58% (Yeltsin’s support rating were around 2-5% during his last

¹⁰⁴ Tim McDaniel, in *New Republic*, (November 11, 1996)

¹⁰⁵ McFaul, (2004):125

year as the President of the RF).¹⁰⁶ Thus, while the majority of the Western analysts are highly skeptical of how democratic the course of reforms is in Russia, the large segment of the population continues to support the President and his policies. For example, according to a recent poll, 52% of the respondents stated that they would support an amendment to the Constitution that would allow the president to be elected for the third term (currently, the Constitution allows the president to hold a maximum of two consecutive terms), 21% said they are against it and 27% could not answer the question.¹⁰⁷ When the wording of the question was changed, specifying that the change of the Constitution would be done to allow Putin run for the office once again, the number of those who supported this statement rose to 57% (versus 26% of those who disagree with this idea).¹⁰⁸

When one attempts to examine the reasons behind this immense support for President Putin, two major theories provide a theoretical framework for such analysis.¹⁰⁹ The cultural theory states that there are deeply engraved historical perceptions about the leadership in Russia (such as strong, charismatic leader), and Putin's personality corresponds with these images of 'good leader'. Neo-institutional theory, on the other hand, argues that it is only on the objective evaluation of the president's actions and policies, people make their judgments

¹⁰⁶ VTSiOM, Ratings, Support for Politicians, May 2007 <http://wciom.ru/novosti/reitingi/reiting-doverija-politikam.html>

¹⁰⁷ FOM: Public Opinion Foundation, "Presidential Terms: Two or More?" Public Opinion Survey, September 22, 2005

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ see William Mischler and John P. Willerton, "The Dynamics of Presidential Popularity in Post-Communist Russia: Cultural Imperatives vs. Neo-Institutional Choice?" *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (February 2003), 111-141

about his suitability for the position and their support for him. When these theories were applied to examine the performance of and the support for both Yeltsin's and Putin's leadership, a conclusion was made that both theories are correct in their explanations, though there is an increasing tendency towards the domination of the neo-institutional explanations.¹¹⁰ This argument is supported by the increase of Putin's popularity in the second term, when he was finally able to detach himself from Yeltsin's 'family' and pursue a more active, radical and personalized course of reforms.¹¹¹

5.2 *Putin's "Managed Democracy" and Political Parties*

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin first emerged on the federal political arena in 1999 when he was appointed as the Prime Minister by Yeltsin. Being little known to the general public, his appointment to such a high position was rather unexpected and produced bewilderment both in the government and in the society. However, while little known at the national level, he had a significant exposure to the intricacies of politics in Russia both before and after the collapse of the communist regime. He served as a KGB officer for 15 years before taking on a position of the Head of the External Affairs in the St. Petersburg Mayor's Office under Sobchak. In 1998 he was transferred to Moscow, being appointed as the First Deputy Chief of the Presidential Staff for regions. During the same year, he was reappointed several times, finally taking the position of the head of the FSB. In August of 1999, Vladimir Putin was appointed as the Prime Minister

¹¹⁰ see Mischler and Willerton, 111-141

¹¹¹ Roy Medvedev, *Vladimir Putin: Vtoroy Srok*, (Vremya Publishing, 2006), 34-44

of Russia, becoming the acting President after unexpected resignation of President Yeltsin in December 1999.

The main challenge to the development of a multiparty system in Russia after Putin came to power was his declaration that Russia should pursue a model different from the 'Western-type democracy', a model he described as a "managed democracy".¹¹² This term is interpreted by many as a political oxymoron: after all, the essence of democracy is its power to choose. Putin's proposed form of democracy is characterized by skillful mending of policies, decisions and reforms towards the desired outcome. According to Nikolay Petrov of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the following are the characteristics of the "managed democracy": 1) a strong presidency and weak institutions; 2) state control of the media; 3) control over elections allows elites to legitimize their decisions; and 4) visible short-term effectiveness and long-term inefficiency.¹¹³

Similar view on the notion of 'managed democracy' is held by Yuri Levada regarding the tools and goals of this model:

"... this [managed democracy] means that a strong executive atop an effective state bureaucracy will see to it that orders are followed. Political decisions are to be made behind the scenes. The people may vote, but those in power will, if need be, "correct" the people's choice. Parliament remains, but is sidelined. The administrative apparatus does not represent

¹¹² For more discussion on 'managed democracy' see Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov, and Andrey Riabov, *Between Democracy and Dictatorship: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform*. (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2004); Roy Medvedev, *Vladimir Putin: Vtoroy Srok*. (Vremia, 2006); Boris Kagarlitsky, *Upravlyaemaya Dmeokratia: Rossia Kotoruyu Nam Navyazali (Managed Democracy: Russia that was Forced Upon Us)*. Ultra Kultura, (2005).

¹¹³ Nikolai Petrov, "The Essence of Managed Democracy", Notes from the Carnegie Moscow Centre Meeting on President's Putin Managed Democracy, October 18, 2005. <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/index.cfm?fa=eventDetail&id=819>

any definite ideology, but instead borrows pragmatically from others—right and left, Westernizers and nationalist alike—in ways that bring the government achievements (or at least accolades), even if the whole process undermines pluralism by so freely co-opting so many different ideas.”¹¹⁴

Clearly, such model does not fit the traditional definition of democracy, which presumes fair and free elections, ability of the populace to choose their leaders, freedom of expression as well as a representative and a responsible government among other characteristics. The Russian model of managed democracy not only undermines this traditional definition, but also alters the political processes and institutions, which are vital for democratic transition. In order to further consolidate the presidential power, Putin implemented several reforms that were aimed at strengthening the centre and giving it more control over regional governments. Two of the major reforms in this area were the change in the process of appointment of the regional governors from direct election to nomination by the President, and the restructuring of the federal organization of the state (as the result, the Russian Federation was divided into seven administrative regional districts and the heads of the new regional districts – the Presidential Representatives- were directly appointed by the President). Also, as we saw in the overview of post-communist elections, a new pro-Kremlin political party – United Russia- emerged in 1999, and it would become the strongest party in Russia in just a few years. These factors and their affect on the party system formation will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

¹¹⁴ Levada, 46

Putin's model of democracy also poses a significant challenge to the ability of the opposition parties to play an active role in the government. Leaders of such political parties as Yabloko, SPS, LDPR and CPRF recognize their structural weakness as well as the necessity to address the current problems in a more active manner. A. Melnikov, the member of the Yabloko party, recently wrote:

“Of course, those political parties that represent civil society in Russia (i.e. not pro-Kremlin political parties) have a lot of problems to address: to regulate financing of the parties not through the big businesses (which are largely dependent on Kremlin), but through citizens; to organize propaganda of their ideas (under the conditions of mass media control created by Putin); to increase membership in the political parties; and, finally, to build a stronger networks between the parties and the electorate. Political parties should function actively at work places, in schools and universities. The very existence of political parties representing Russian civil society will depend upon how successful political parties would be in dealing with these problems.”¹¹⁵

Thus, those parties that are in opposition to the current government recognize their weakness in the current system, and their position is not likely to improve due to the direction of reforms taken by the current government. Currently, Russia's civil society struggles to create an opposition movement that would be able to gain enough momentum to mobilize the apathetic electorate and ignite political consciousness of the Russian people. For example, from March to December 2006 to May 2007, a series of active political demonstrations, named the “March of Dissenters”, were held in Moscow, St. Petesburg, Samara, Chelyabinsk and Nizhnyj Novgorod in opposition to Putin's policy direction and

¹¹⁵ Alexei Melnikov, “The End of Russian Political Parties?” 4 January, 2004. Yabloko Party Official website: http://www.yabloko.ru/Publ/Book/Putin/yb_put020.html

his government.¹¹⁶ The march gathered a lot of media attention both within Russia and in the Western media, criticizing the violent response by the police, sanctioned by the government.¹¹⁷ The response of the government also discouraged the participators, and their number significantly declined even according to the estimates of the March's organizers.¹¹⁸ Without going into more depth on this complex issue, it is important to emphasize that there are groups in Russia that are willing and able to voice their opposition to the government, but their approach to solving the problems is rather extremist and lacks consistency.

5.3 Citizen and Elite Attitudes toward Political Parties

Another important factor which significantly affects the development and the consolidation of the party system in Russia is the attitudes and perceptions people have about political parties. As noted at the beginning of the thesis, political parties traditionally had a rather poor image in Russia. This trend was reinforced by the years of political suppression during the CPSU period in power and the following political transition, marked by chaos, lack of accountability, political confusion and corruption. As a result, many Russians continue to mistrust political parties as democratic institutions. In fact, political parties remain to be the *least* trusted institutions in Russia: only 5% of the population has trust in

¹¹⁶ For more information, see: "Die-Hard Kremlin Opponents Take Protest to Streets", *Reuters*, March 2, 2007; Mark Ames, "The Russian Protestors: the Guessing Game", *The Nation*, June 12, 2007.

¹¹⁷ Dmitry Lovetsky, "Dozens Held in Russia Opposition Rally", *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2007

¹¹⁸ Mark Ames, *The Nation*, June 12, 2007.

political parties, the lowest number among all social and political institutions.¹¹⁹ It is important to consider that an overall trust in the social and governmental institutions of the Russian citizens is extremely low, ranging from 47% for President Putin at the top to the 5% support for political parties at the bottom.¹²⁰ This demonstrates a concerning dynamic of weak and continuously declining faith in the political coalitions and associations by the electorate, which predominantly views the party system as a “show business” rather than a democratic and representative institution.

What is the current role of political parties in the political and social life as perceived by the population in Russia? This question was asked by the FOM: Public Opinion Foundation in their recent survey of the role of political parties in Russia. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents consistently consider the role of political parties as negligible (declining from 49% in 2001 to 44% in 2007), and only a third of the respondents assessed the role of the political parties as significant (with over 20% found this question hard to answer).¹²¹ Also, the majority of those surveyed do not support the rivalry between political parties: only 25% said that competition among parties can be useful for the country with 46% believing it has negative effects. The implications of these responses lead us to conclude that the overall perception about the multiparty system and its effectiveness in Russia today is negative.

¹¹⁹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Trust in Public Institutions in Russia: The Lowest in the World,” *Johnson’s Russia List*, (June 27, 2005)

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ The Public Opinion Foundation, “Political Parties in Russian Life”, Public Opinion Poll, April 5, 2007 http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/P/political_party/ed071422

Also, political parties are often seen as unnecessary by nearly half of the population. According to several surveys conducted by the FOM during the period between 2004 and 2007, the majority of respondents assessed the role of political parties as having a negative affect on Russia (53% in 2001 and 43% in 2007).¹²² Only 23% of respondents stated that political parties have a positive impact on Russia in 2007 (only a 1% increase from 2001).¹²³ Thus, a large segment of the Russian populaiton not only distrusts the political parties, but also does not see their positive effect on the Russian politics.

Similar results were produced by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM) in November 2006. Their conclusions reflected the analogous attitudes and perceptions held by the Russian citizens towards the political parties. According to a recent poll conducted by the VTsIOM, one in five Russians agrees with the idea that "Russia needs leaders, not parties", while one in four respondents thinks that Russia needs only one "national ruling party."¹²⁴ Also, the majority of the respondents were not sure about the importance of the political parties in Russia today: 74% of the polled citizens agreed that a strong and firm government is of utmost importance for Russia, rather than a multiparty system, and only 15% disagreed with this statement.

When a direct question about the necessity of a multiparty system was asked, the respondents were divided: 48% said that political parties are a necessary attribute in the modern society, 30% said that we don't need strong

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Elena Grigorieva and Grigorii Ilyichev, "How Many Parties Does Russia Need?" *Izvestia*, October 20, 2006, pp. 1, 3

political parties, and 22% were uncertain how to answer.¹²⁵ The same poll indicated that the majority of the respondents, however, believe that political parties are either of little significance in present-day Russia (36%), or do not have any significance (28%), and only 24% think that parties play an important role in Russia today.¹²⁶

The results from these two polls lead us to several conclusions. First, political parties were unable to connect with the electorate and gain their trust, which is fundamental for the establishment of a strong multiparty system. The role of political parties in Russia is viewed by the majority of the respondents as insignificant, and, according to Grigorieva and Ilyichev, "no one has done more than parties and politicians themselves to destroy public confidence in parties and politicians over the past 15 years of post-Soviet development."¹²⁷ Political parties remain the instruments of getting into power and politics rather than using their position for articulation and mobilization of interests and values as well as representation of those interests in the government.

Secondly, the majority of the Russian citizens support a smaller number of political parties than currently exists. While today there are several successful political associations representing various ideological positions, the majority of them fail to be successful in linking the government with the people due to parties' internal weakness and instability, as well as the institutional and political system within which they function.

¹²⁵ Grigorieva and Ilyichev.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Does Russia have an effective multiparty system today? The answer to this question differs significantly both in the population and among the political elite. One of the leading advisors to President Putin, Vladislav Surkov is confident that Russia already has a two party system.¹²⁸ He stated that today there are two major political camps: the United Russia and the group of three other political parties currently in the parliament (CPRF, LDPR, and the Motherland). Considering the results of the March 2007 elections (discussed below), his view is far from erroneous. Other political parties are continuously failing to gather support of the electorate, and continue to be focused on the internal politics such as leadership struggles and coalition building. On the other hand, the recent reforms implemented by the Putin's government significantly limit the fundamental ability of the other parties to reach out to the electorate by putting in place requirements for the registration with the Electoral Commission that only a handful of state-sponsored parties would be able to meet.

A similar position was expressed by the leader of United Russia Boris Gрызlov. He claims that: "the State Duma is not the field for political struggles, but rather is an institution for effective political activity."¹²⁹ Considering the control United Russia has in the State Duma (not only in terms of seats it holds, but also the control of all of the major ministers and commissions' mandates), Urnov and Kasamara demonstrate that the lower house of the parliament is no longer a separate legislative branch of power but is rather an institution which implements

¹²⁸ Vladislav Surkov, "Freedom Takes Some Getting Used to", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 18, 2006, p. 10

¹²⁹ Mark Urnov and Valeria Kasamara, *Sovremennaya Rossia: Vyzovy I Otvety*, (Moscow, 2005):33-34

the will of the President into laws.¹³⁰ While this view might be considered extreme by some analysts, it emphasizes the distortion of the representative nature of the institutional structures, and, consequently, the declining ability of the opposition parties to significantly impact on the decision-making process in the State Duma.

5.4 The New Generation of Parties: United Russia and Just Russia

The turning point in the process of the party system development occurred during 1999-2000, with the establishment of Unity, the new pro-presidential party of power. It first emerged as a group of political parties in the summer of 1999, half a year before the next parliamentary election. The creation of Unity (which later became the United Russia) party in 1999 signified a new stage in the process of not only party system transition in Russia, but also a new period in the political life in the Russian Federation. This political party was able to utilize all the resources to which it had access to; it was able to gain massive support of the electorate; and, finally, it was able to build strong regional networks – something the majority of the political parties (including the CPRF and LDPR) could not achieve.

What are the reasons behind the overwhelming popularity of United Russia? First, the party is associated with President Putin and his reforms. During its first electoral campaign (for the 2003 Duma election) the party's main slogan was "We are behind Putin", which was a rather vague, yet appealing catchphrase for the electorate who supported Putin's reforms during his first term.

¹³⁰ Urnov and Kasamara, 34

Social and political stability as well as the economic growth were seen by the majority of the population as the result of the President's reforms and tough measures on crime and corruption. In the seven years in power, Putin was able to not only stabilize the economy and increase social security of Russian citizens, but also to foster confidence of the population in the presidential administration, government and the course of reforms. United Russia was not officially endorsed by the President, but its programs and positions clearly reflected the same leitmotif expressed in the government policies, illuminating a close connection between the president, his apparatus and United Russia.

Second, the United Russia was the only political party that was able to gain support not only in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other major cities but also in the periphery. It established 2597 local offices and 53740 primary offices in every single federal district in Russia, demonstrating its strong institutional base and growing regional support.¹³¹ In fact, the party was initially created by the heads of regional administrations and regional governors, including such prominent political figures as Alexander Lebed, Evgenij Nazdratenko, Eduard Rossel and Alexander Rutskoj.¹³² It is hard to assess whether the support of regional elite for this political party is based on calculated cost/benefit analysis or is genuine in nature. Nevertheless, it is clear that the United Russia became the only political party with strong connections with the regions, something no other party was able to do in sixteen years of transition.

¹³¹ United Russia Official Website, <http://www.er.ru/>

¹³² Colton and McFaul, (2003), 50-51

Another important event in the process of the party system formation occurred in November 2006: three smaller political parties (the Party of Life, Rodina and the Party of Pensioners) merged into one - Just (or Fair) Russia. According to the official statements, this political party united the political associations which focus on the social welfare and social security, especially for those who are the least protected by the social programs (pensioners, veterans, poorer segments of the population).¹³³ In reality, Just Russia is a more social, left-wing reincarnation of United Russia, and it includes a number of prominent political figures that were either a member of the United Russia or were strongly associated with President Putin's administration. V. Pribylovsky, the head of Moscow's Panorama think tank, argues that: "The party [Just Russia] was created by the presidential administration to snatch the center-left electorate," and adds that together with United Russia, they would possibly be able to get over half, or two-thirds, of votes for the State Duma elections.¹³⁴ Thus, the creation of Just Russia party is considered by many analysts as another initiative of the government and Putin's administration to monopolize voters by creating artificial political parties, which would provide a sense of alternatives to the current political regime.

The Just Russia performed surprisingly well during the March 2007 regional elections, winning seats in 13 out of 14 regions participating in the elections. The party, led by the Federal Council Speaker Sergey Mironov, was

¹³³ see Just Russia's Party Platform: http://www.spravedlivo.ru/about/documents/section_599/

¹³⁴ Claire Bigg, "Russia: Parties Unite into Nominal Opposition Force", *Radio Free Europe*, October 31, 2006

able to significantly increase their popular support from 2-3% in December 2006 to taking between 8% and 16% of the vote in March elections.

One of the advantages of the United Russia, as well as other centrist political parties, is its ability to focus on the current needs and interests of the Russian electorate. Economic stability, elimination of corruption and social security are at the top of the United Russia's agenda. Just Russia also reflects the hierarchy of needs and concerns of the Russian citizens. According to the recent poll conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM), "citizens are concerned about the following issues (in descending order): high prices for housing and utilities (46%), alcohol abuse (37%), inflation (36%), high prices for healthcare and medications (32%), inability to afford food and consumer goods (28%), inability to find a good job (28%), the bureaucracy and its arbitrary actions (25%), drug abuse (25%), insufficient and unaffordable housing (21%), unaffordable education (16%), and so on."¹³⁵ Considering the close connection between both parties (United Russia and Just Russia) and the government, they not only have an access to the resources to deal with these problems, but also are able to appeal to the widest segment of the population and relate to their needs.

The creation of United Russia and Just Russia indicates three important dynamics in the party system development in Russia under President Putin. First, for the first time the government was able to establish a strong party of power as well as form satellite political parties on the left, capable to attract electorate while

¹³⁵ Editorial, "United and Just" *Vedomosti*, November 22, 2006, p. A4

remaining closely connected to the government.¹³⁶ These new political parties are becoming increasingly successful as the population loses its trust in the old political parties due to their inability to address current problems and be effective representatives of the electorate in the parliament.

Secondly, the success of these new political associations is correlated with how much support they get from the federal government. In particular, United Russia and Just Russia were synthetically created by the leading political elite (with United Russia occupying the leading position and Just Russia being an artificial alternative), rather than being created from the bottom up. Being closely associated with Putin's government, these parties were able to develop a positive image and a strong structural base, which would definitely improve their position in the next elections. Tatiana Stoyanova explains:

“United Russia is the strongest party of power in Russia's modern history. This is largely due to the popularity of the president, who supports it, and the authorities themselves securing a firmer power base: elite groups have consolidated around the president, a vertical of power has been established, and oligarchs have become ordinary businessmen (whereas business once played a proactive role in party building). Strong authorities mean a strong party of power. At the same time, the political value of the party of power for the Kremlin has increased significantly.”¹³⁷

At the same time, the other new political parties, are suffering the same fate as the 'sofa parties' in the early 1990's: unable to satisfy rigid requirements in the political system increasingly supportive of limited number of parties, most new political parties are unable to become serious contestants in the elections. While

¹³⁶ Tatiana Stanovaya, “What is Russian Party of Power?” *RIA Novosti*, 14 June, 2005

¹³⁷ Ibid.

the United Russia is gaining power, the opposition parties are losing their battles with the system and with the electorate.

CHAPTER VI. THE FUTURE OF PARTY SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA

*Freedom is when the people can speak,
democracy is when the government listens.
Alastair Farrugia
(Mathematician and social activist)*

What does the future hold for political parties in Russia? The answer to this question will depend upon several factors, such as the course of future administrative and political reforms, the constitutional and legal framework within which the political parties function as well as the political behaviour and attitudes of the electorate.

6.1 Party Reform

One of the most important factors that would potentially seriously determine the role of parties in the Russian politics is the new law on political parties, which was adopted in 2001. It came into full power in 2003 after a two-year waiting period and changed the environment within which the political parties would function in Russia. Some of the key goals of the new law were: to establish a solid institutional framework for political parties, increase their regional representation, and potentially limit the number of political parties currently existing in Russia. Since the collapse of the one-party system in 1991, the number of political parties mushroomed and it remained high even after ten years of transition. However, the number of the registered and qualified for the elections parties always was significantly higher than the number of electoral associations on the ballot (i.e. in 1993, 13 out of 167 electoral associations participated in the

Duma elections; in 1995, 43 out of 273 and 43 took part in the elections; in 1999, 26 out of 139 electoral associations contested the elections).¹³⁸ By 1999, the number of the political parties and factions rose to over 75, 000, and the number of regional and federal parties was close to 300.¹³⁹ Thus, the goal of the government was to establish a set of clear and precise requirements for political associations and systematize the party system.

Since the proposal was signed into law in 2001, several amendments were made, further limiting the number of political parties as well as their ability to participate in the various processes of democratization. According to the new amendments, all political parties should have a minimum of 50,000 members and they should have regional offices in at least half of the federal districts with no less than 500 people in each.¹⁴⁰ This was a significant increase from the initial requirement of 10,000 members with at least 100 representatives in half of the federal districts' offices.¹⁴¹ Thus, this reform had two major consequences on the system: first, it limited the number of political parties in Russia, and, second, it created stronger links between the periphery and the centre. It also established for the first time the requirement on the regional representation of parties, which would strengthen the connection between the central and regional offices and, potentially, improve the level of political participation in the periphery.

¹³⁸ Mukhrat Safarov, "Party System Reform in Russia through the Prism of Democracy and Federalism", (in Russian), *Kazanskii Federalist*, Vol. 17-18 (1-2), Winter/Spring, (2006), <http://www.kazanfed.ru/publications/kazanfederalist/n17-18/5/>

¹³⁹ Kisovskaya cited in Safarov.

¹⁴⁰ Party reform

¹⁴¹ "On Political Parties: Federal Law 95-FZ", Chapter 1, Article 3. <http://www.russiaprofile.org/resources/political/partylaws/>

What does this law mean for the future of political parties in Russia? On one hand, it provides a partial solution to the problem of alienation between the centre and the regions by institutionalizing political parties. It also entices political parties to create networks and connections between federal and local governments. On the other hand, the majority of the political parties were created in the centre (Moscow and St. Petersburg) and from the top (by the political elite). Therefore, an attempt to build support for the parties in the periphery is likely to be translated into struggle for control of the local administrations, rather than provide an incentive for electoral mobilization and regional representation. It is doubtful that this new law would facilitate party activity in the regions as the majority of the population remains very skeptical of parties' role in the political realm. Rather, the newly created party system structure would further consolidate the power of the federal government and serve as the tool of manipulation of the regional elite.

Another major outcome is the lower number of political parties that will be able to take part in the elections¹⁴². As already noted previously, the number of political parties in Russia remained extremely high, though their participation and success in elections was limited. The new system would potentially ensure that only those political fractions and organizations that have a strong electoral base as well as the regional representation would be able to contest seats in the State Duma. On the other hand, under the new law, the majority of the new, smaller parties will not be able to reach the required standards of membership and

¹⁴² Mikhail Savin, "The New Law on Political Parties: Responses from the Public", *Predstavitel'naya Vlast'*, 2000 №4 (38).

registration (especially, for the upcoming December 2007 elections), and, therefore, will be excluded from the competition. Considering the current apathy of the voters in Russia and the weak support for the parties as the representative institutions, the electorate would be significantly limited in its choice because of the inability of the new political parties to fulfill the registration requirements as outlined in the new law. As a result, the role of the small, recently created political parties would be seriously undermined, and, it would also, possibly, discourage an emergence of new parties.

This new law demonstrates the continuation of the path taken by Putin and his administration in the process of state building. The recent developments and changes to the Constitution indicate that the multiparty system in Russia at present is in jeopardy. By establishing means of control of the regional political elites, and by gaining a foothold in the regional legislatures, Putin is continuing to consolidate his vertical of power. In this system of tight, yet very skillful, control of the political activity in Russia political parties are faced with additional impediments in the process of development. While United Russia and Just Russia benefit from the wide (though, not deep) support of the population and the significant financial resources, other political parties are faced with the challenges of internal weakness, inability to connect with the electorate and the constant struggle with the system, which becomes increasingly unsympathetic to the notion of the multiparty system.

Thus, the process of the party system development in Russia changed its direction since the implementation of the new law on political parties. Today, they remain to be the weakest and the least trusted political institutions, and the future

of the party development seems bleak. By trying to eliminate the corrupted regional elite and to connect periphery with the centre, Putin's reforms also created an environment that is not conducive to the development of the strong multiparty system. The new law is another step towards stabilizing the political spectrum and, most importantly, ensuring that the new party of power would remain the dominant force in the government and in the society.¹⁴³

6.2 *Regional Elections – March 2007*

On March 11, 2007, 14 federal regions held elections for their local legislatures. These elections were considered by many as a rehearsal for the national Duma elections in December 2007, and the results were fairly predictable before the poll stations were even opened. Only four parties - Unified Russia, Just Russia, the CPRF, and the LDPR- were registered for all 14 regional elections. United Russia won a landsliding victory in all fourteen regions with an average of 46% of the vote in each of the districts.¹⁴⁴ The Communist party took a second place with an average of 15% of votes. However, as A. Shatilov argues, the party remains to be in a prolonged crisis, and it is hard to estimate how this party will perform in the December 2007 State Duma election.¹⁴⁵ Another pro-Kremlin political party led by federal Council Speaker S. Mironov, Just Russia, also performed well taking seats in 13 out of 14 regional legislatures. In Stavropol Krai, Just Russia took 37% of the vote, which came as a shocking and

¹⁴³ Andrei Lihtenstein, "The Law on Political Parties. Strategies for Elite Party Formation in Russia: the Party of Power", June 27, 2007 <http://www.democracy.ru/>

¹⁴⁴ Olga Korotkova, "Dress Rehearsal for the Duma Elections: Russia Swings to the Left Again", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 15, 2007.

¹⁴⁵ Alexey Shatilov, "Will March be Repeated in December? State Duma Election 2007: Forecast", *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, March 24, 2007

unpleasant surprise to the leaders of the United Russia party. An unforeseen victory was taken by the Union of the Right Forces (SPS), which won 6.86% of the vote. It comes very close to the new federal threshold of 7% set for the national election in December 2007. After its loss in the 2003 elections, SPS significantly improved its image and position by replacing its leader (from Boris Nemtsov to Nikita Belykh), and putting a few new faces in the additional effort that could make SPS to be elected back into the State Duma. The Liberal – Democratic Party finished with the average result of almost 9%, indicating that its position did not change significantly since the 2003 Duma election, and the party is expected to maintain 8-9% popularity in the next Duma.

These elections were characterised by a high number of political associations and factions that were not allowed to participate for a variety of reasons (falsification of signatures required for registration, inability to fulfill the requirements set by the new law on political parties). In total, 17 political parties and blocs were removed from the ballot.¹⁴⁶

The results of the March election indicate some important developments in the party system in the Russian Federation since 2000. First, there is a clear tendency towards fewer political parties being elected in the legislature. This tendency emerged in the 2003 legislative elections and was further consolidated by the new law on the political parties, as well as the raised threshold for the PR list (from 5% to 7%) set for 2007 December election. It is the result of both the socio-political dynamics developing in the society (people prefer fewer political

¹⁴⁶ Daria Guseva, "Yavki Ne Provaleny," *Kommersant*, March 12, 2007.

parties) and the legal and institutional restructuring of the system within which the political parties function (such as the law on political parties discussed above).

Secondly, many commentators forecast that these regional elections were a 'dress rehearsal' for the State Duma election in December 2007.¹⁴⁷ While usually the political developments in Russia are far from predictable, it is unlikely that the balance of powers between the political parties would significantly differ in the next State Duma. United Russia and Just Russia possess unmatched resources (such as the media, financial support, access to decision-making personnel, regional connections, etc.) and are able to cover the widest electoral base, regardless of having vague programs and being generally the 'catch-all' parties.

6.3 *Potential Problems for the Party System Development*

The major characteristic, which emerged in the mid 1990's and continues to shape Russia's political landscape today, is the floating structure of the party system. There are only two electoral entities that successfully won seats in the four consecutive parliamentary elections held in Russia since 1991 – the CPRF and the LDPR. All the other political parties disintegrated shortly after elections, joined another party or formed a coalition with other electoral blocs. It is important to emphasize that none of the 'parties of power' were able to sustain themselves in the long term (except for United Russia, which is increasingly gaining power *and* popular support). Also, the democrats failed to form a strong coalition, which

¹⁴⁷ see "Russian local polls seen as dress rehearsal for Duma elections," BBC World Monitoring, March 1, 2007

would be a powerful contestant in the elections. Currently, the democratic forces are represented by two major political parties: the Union of the Right Forces (SPS) and the Yabloko. However, neither of them was able to pass the 5% threshold in the 2003 parliamentary elections. According to the co-leader of the SPS, Irina Khakamada these political parties would have the same fate in the upcoming 2007 elections. She argues that this failure of the liberal bloc to win seats in the State Duma is rooted not only in the inability of the democratic forces to unite, but also in the lack of adequate pressure from the people to pursue a genuinely democratic path of reforms:

“[The] people's protest has not reached the point when they need a genuine renewal. [] But this will only depend on the people and occur as soon as people realize that they want to build their own democracy. As long as people are quiet, our political structure will have nothing to do with the development of party system.”¹⁴⁸

Another major impediment which emerged in the process of party system formation in Russia after 1991, and which is closely related to the previous problem, is a lack of the political activism in the society. The majority of the Russian electorate remains highly sceptical of the political parties as democratic institutions, which eventually transfers into political indifference, low levels of participation and heightened mistrust towards the political elites. Carothers provides an explanation for this behaviour: “[...] citizens came out of the experience of life under dictatorship with a strong cynicism about politics and parties, a cynicism that breeds political apathy and negativism.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ “Khakamada says 3-party system for Russia, doubts 2007 chances,” *RIA Novosti*, August 21, 2006

¹⁴⁹ Timothy Carothers, “No Party for Parties”, *Moscow Times*, December 10, 2003

Also, the majority of the currently existing parties in Russia were artificially created by the political elites during the period of transition (1991-2007), rather than being evolved naturally from the grassroots of civil society. According to Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin, the formation of the political associations was a top-down process and, in essence, was a fragmentation of the nomenclature, rather than organization of the masses around common goals and values.¹⁵⁰ The parties played the role of a populist or an ideological camp for symbolic identification, failing to fulfill their fundamental role – to create a party with a concrete set of priorities and goals, as well as a clear plan for action, manifested in the party program.¹⁵¹ Today, giving the conditions under which United Russia, Motherland, and Just Russia were created and their growing popularity, the question arises whether the Russian electorate would ever be able to change the traditional Russian model of the political development, which is based upon the strong leadership and politically reticent masses.

The competition among political parties is another major problem in the process of the party system development. According to Yuri Levada, the competition between the political parties is a mere façade:

“There were numerous political parties and blocs, but no coherent multiparty system with solidly differentiated party ideologies and interests. The main game in the political arena was the competition between the former party of power and its successor, a contention that could be traced back to the split between conservatives and reformists in the Gorbachev-era Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Rivalry between the factions was at its highest in

¹⁵⁰ Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin, “Post-totalitarian Syndrome: “Managed Democracy” and Mass Apathy”, in ed. *Pathways of Russian Post-Communism (in Russian)*, M. Lipman and A. Ryabov, Moscow Carnegie Centre, R. Elinin Publishing, Moscow (2007): 21

¹⁵¹ Gudkov and Dubin, 21

1993 and 1996, when both sides were trying to win voter support. This left little room for nuance on the political spectrum. Despite the existence of rough political divisions, the main player would become the state apparatus itself.”¹⁵²

Levada's argument is clearly supported by the recent developments in the party system. In particular, the Presidential administration has taken various steps towards securing its power and influence. On one hand, pro - Kremlin party United Russia was able to not only gain significant control of the State Duma with 224 seats, but also to achieve the popular support not seen since the CPSU period. On the other, through a number of policies and reforms the institutional and structural system was altered, limiting both the number of political parties on the political landscape, as well as their ability to exert pressure on the government. The newly created political parties (such as Motherland, Just Russia, and others) were also formed by the political elites, and instead of providing alternatives to the regime, they act as a willing opposition. In other words, these parties could be considered synthetically generated political entities that would provide an image of the opposition, but which is in reality nothing more than a mirage.

6.4 *Presidential Power vs. Party Power*

Another factor that currently undermines the development of a strong multiparty system in Russia is the power of the executive as outlined in the constitution. As discussed earlier, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia went through a complex process of constitutional restructuring, which resulted in

¹⁵² Levada, 46

the political system with strong presidential powers and relatively weak parliament. For example, Article 90(1) of the 1993 Constitution allows the President to rule by decrees and directives. As the result, when the president does not have a legislative majority (as in the case with former President Yeltsin), the executive has enough constitutional leverage to subdue the powers of the parliament, thereby further strengthening superpresidentialism as the main characteristics of the regime.¹⁵³ In contrast with Yeltsin, Putin was not only able to fully employ the constitutionally defined powers of the presidential office, but also to gain control of the lower house of the Russian Parliament, the State Duma with the pro-Kremlin parties holding the majority of seats. This resulted in the guaranteed approval from all branches of power of all the reforms and policies proposed by the presidential administration, and, at the same time, taming of the opposition forces.

S. White identifies another weakness in the system, which further undermines the power and the role of the political parties in Russia. He argues that the political factions and associations have little institutional incentives to compete for popular support because “the Russian Duma had no direct implication for the composition of the government or the direction of public policy,” and the fact that the Prime Minister owns his position to the confidence of the president, not the support of the electorate.¹⁵⁴ White compares the amount of control the Russian president has to that of the monarch in imperial Russia, especially in his ability to issue laws, appoint those who would implement them,

¹⁵³ Timothy J. Colton and Cindy Skach, “The Russian Predicament,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, Number 3, (July 2005): 120

¹⁵⁴ White, (2000): 61

and administer justice.¹⁵⁵ White's argument refers to the period of President Yeltsin (which was marked by extreme superpresidentialism), and situation only deteriorated further in the relation to the power of the parties when Putin became the President of the Russian Federation. In particular, his positive image and the strong support of the general population further legitimized his strong position and the nearly absolute powers of the presidential apparatus, rather than the representative institutions (such as the State Duma). As the result, the role of the parties is being challenged by this system, unless it is the party that directly benefits from the close association with the president.

Another important aspect of superpresidentialism in Russia is the lack of official party affiliation of the executive. Yeltsin remained outside of any political party during his time in the office despite repeated suggestions to form a pro-presidential political party and, according to Colton and Skach, it resulted in Yeltsin's high dependence upon oligarchs and political elite.¹⁵⁶ Putin, on the other hand, realized that in order to consolidate his power he would need the support of all political institutions, including the State Duma and the Federal Council. Thus, the creation of the pro-Kremlin political party, the United Russia, as well as a number of smaller, satellite parties, provided a new swirl in the process of political transition in Russia. Putin is not officially a member of the United Russia, but the party is the main supporter of the executive's decision in the legislature: with over three quarters of the seats taken by the United Russia and its coalition, Putin's

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 62

¹⁵⁶ Colton and Skach, 120

administration has control over virtually any decision/law/issue which goes to the Duma.

Also, J. Ishiyama and R. Kennedy argue that during the first decade of post-Soviet transition the role of superpresidentialism on the development of political parties was overstated, and they cautiously note that the 1999 parliamentary elections demonstrated less continuity in the electoral performance of the political parties.¹⁵⁷ Their prediction that the future of the party development in Russia would largely depend upon whether the political parties on the centre-right of the spectrum remain coherent in the next election was correct: while United Russia performed extremely well (taking 222 seats in the 2003 Duma), both Yabloko and SPS failed to pass the 5% threshold, thereby shifting the dynamic of party system formation from pluralism to centralization.

¹⁵⁷ John T. Ishiyama and Ryan Kennedy, "Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 8 (December 2001):1187-1188

CHAPTER VII. CONCLUSIONS

*A free society is one where it is safe to be unpopular.
Adlai Ewing Stevenson*

This thesis examined the development, evolution and formation of the party system in Russia. It looked at a variety of factors that influenced and shaped both the political parties as well as the system within which they function. This process of the party system establishment in post-communist Russia could be broadly divided into two major stages. The first one occurred during Yeltsin's period in power from 1991 to 1999. As discussed above, this stage was characterized by a highly unstable, fluid and unpredictable behaviour of the political parties. It was the result of the complex restructuring of the political institutions, re-socialization of people, and reformation of the legal system, as well as the personal goals and interests of the political elite. The chaos that dominated all spheres of the socio-political life in Russia during this period provided the perfect opportunity for Yeltsin to consolidate the presidential power, and, by default, weaken the party system role in the decision-making process. It is important to emphasize that B. Yeltsin was not interested in the establishment of the strong political parties in Russia during the first decade as he was more focused on preserving his status and enhancing his powers through political and legal manipulation.

The party system creation during this period was also strongly undermined by the growing mistrust towards the political parties which was a response to the deteriorating economic and social conditions in the country, as well as the

growing superpresidentialism and high levels of corruption. Furthermore, the newly emerged party system was extremely unstable due to the continuous changeover of the political parties and their leaders. In particular, only two three political parties consistently won seats in all three Dumas in 1990s: the Communist Party, the LDPR and Yabloko. Of the 13 parties that contested seats in the 1993 election, 5 disappeared by 1995 and three more vanished by the 1999 election; out of 43 parties participating in the election in 1995, 35 disappeared by 1999. Thus, the creation of a multiparty system was marked by continuous creation, disintegration and merging of the political movements, organizations, and/or parties. While all new democracies go through this process of party formation and subsequent consolidation (some faster and with less obstacles than other), in the case of Russia, the party system formation was strongly undermined by the emerging trend of superpresidentialism and the growing power of pro-presidential/pro-government parties.

The second stage has begun in 1999 (when Putin first emerged on the federal political arena), and it is continuing to the present day. This period of party system development is in sharp contrast with the previous one. In particular, Putin recognized that in order to gain legitimacy, he would need to gain the support of all major political institutions, especially in the State Duma. It could be concluded that Putin considers political parties to be the instruments of the policy-making and social mobilization, and, depending on the program and goals of the new parties, they could either become a friend or a foe to the federal government, which would definitely be reflected in their effectiveness as well as their ability to function on the political landscape.

A major step towards consolidation of the federal power was made with the reform on the political parties, the federal structure, the Federal Council as well as the changes made to the electoral law. However, in sharp contrast to the Yeltsin's reforms, these changes were aimed at the systemic and structural changes in the state and the governmental process. As a result of these changes, the government gained more control of the regional and local governments, improved socio-economic wellbeing of the least protected segments of the population as well as was able to stabilize the chaotic and corrupted economy, inherited after Yeltsin. On the other hand, today's Russia is still characterized by major violations of human rights, suppression of civil liberties and the lack of ability and willingness of the general public to become active political agents. The increased control of the mass media, pressure on the opposition groups, and the continuous strengthening of the 'vertical of power' all contribute to decline of political and party pluralism in Russia.

Undoubtedly, the President plays a crucial leading role in Russian politics and his immense powers were codified in the 1993 Russian Constitution. However, President Putin was able to consolidate and increase this power even further by establishing a system within which other democratic institutions can effectively function only through a tacit approval of the Kremlin. Thus, it is no surprise that the President does not require a party affiliation to be elected or remain in power. In fact, it is not the President who benefits from the party association in Russia (as in the U.S., United Kingdom or France), but a political party benefits from an association with the President. As long as the President

and his policies are supported by the general population, the political party most closely related to the President is also most likely to gain support of the public.

One of the major questions which emerged from this thesis concerns the future dynamics in the Russian party system after the March 2008 Presidential election. United Russia, the dominant political party in the State Duma today, relies mainly on its close association with V.V. Putin and his policies. Assuming that Putin will not amend the Constitution and will not run for the presidency in 2008, the future of this party as well as its dominant position are in question. One possible scenario for this political conundrum would be for United Russia to expand its political focus and work towards securing its position in the government as well as in the society by more concrete policy proposals, siding with the pro-Kremlin candidates in the next election.¹⁵⁸ Another scenario would require the next president to build stronger connections with the 'party of power' in order to gain relative support and, possibly, leverage in the State Duma. In either case, the dominance of United Russia provides significant challenges for the emergence and development of other political parties.

What can be done to strengthen the party system, and ensure its representativeness and effectiveness in the Russian politics? To put it simply, it would require two major changes, which correspond to two major theoretical approaches often used to analyze Russia's post-communist transition. First, it would be necessary to develop a politically active civil society and the fundamental understanding among citizens of the main principles, values, ideas

¹⁵⁸ According to a number of political analysts, it is very likely that the next Russian president will be from the close circle of Putin's administration. At the top of the list are such names as D. Medvedev and S. Ivanov.

and goals of a democratic state. This approach is often reflected in the sociological-cultural analysis. The political culture of the Russian people does not currently provide enough support for this change. Decades of political and social suppression resulted in the political apathy, lack of trust, and disenchantment with the political parties. In order to alter this behaviour, it is necessary to institute a system with effective checks and balances as well as accountability of the representatives to their constituencies. This idea is closely related to the second point, the institutional structures. From the institutionalist approach, in order to increase political participation and levels of trust for the political institutions, the state must provide an environment within which all segments of the population would be able and willing to respond to the government's policies. Unfortunately, neither of these two conditions is met, and, as the result, the political parties remain in the marginal state of existence.

Another possible solution to the crisis of the party system in Russia was offered by M. McFaul. He suggests to either change the electoral system by eliminating proportional representation in the Duma as a step towards the development of a two-party presidential system, or to eliminate the institution of the presidency and establish a multiparty system in the parliament.¹⁵⁹ Alas, neither of these solutions is likely to be implemented because it would require significant changes to be made to the Constitution, which in turn would potentially limit the power of the executive branch.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that Russia is still in the process of the post-communist transition. While the main democratic institutions and

¹⁵⁹ McFaul (2004), 132

processes were put in place, it will take time for the society and the political elites to adjust to them, overcoming the problems of Russia's political past and taking full advantage of the opportunities lying ahead. The party system is one of the key instruments to achieve this goal, and until the society acknowledges this need for change, the road to democracy would be marked by constant potholes, obstructions and detours.

Table 1. Results of the 1993 State Duma Election

Party/Bloc Name	Proportional %	Proportional Seats	Constituency Seats	Total Seats	Total %
Russia's Choice	15.51	40	30	70	15.6
LDPR	22.92	59	5	64	14.2
Communist Party	12.4	32	16	48	10.7
Agrarian Party	7.99	21	12	33	7.3
Yabloko	7.86	20	3	23	5.1
Women of Russia	8.13	21	2	23	5.1
PRES (Shahrai)	6.76	18	1	19	4.0
DPR (Travkin)	5.52	14	1	15	3.3

Table 2. Results of the 1995 State Duma Election

Party Name	Proportional %	Proportional Seats	Constituency Seats	Total Seats	Total %
LDPR	11.18	50	1	51	11.3
CPSU	22.3	99	58	157	34.9
Our Home Russia	10.13	45	10	55	12.2
Yabloko	6.89	31	14	45	10

Table 3. Results of the 1999 State Duma Election

Party Name	Proportional %	Proportional Seats	Constituency Seats	Total Seats	Total %
CPRF	24.3	67	46	113	25.1
Unity	23.3	64	9	73	16.2
Fatherland, All Russia	13.3	37	31	68	15.1
Union of the Right Forces	8.5	24	5	29	6.4
LDPR	6	17	0	17	3.8
Yabloko	5.9	16	4	20	4.4

Table 4. Results of the 1999 State Duma Election

Party Name	Proportional %	Proportional Seats	Constituency Seats	Total Seats	Total %
United Russia	37.6	120	102	222	49.3
CPRF	12.6	40	12	52	11.6
LDPR	11.5	36	0	36	8.0
Rodina (Motherland)	9.0	29	8	37	8.2

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