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Political analysts predict that the struggle for seats in the State Duma will be not only obstinate but also ruthless. Bribes, libel, blackmail and even murder are expected to play a role in the election process. According to the Russian Constitution, the Duma is a relatively weak legislative body, but the deputies have convinced themselves more than once that this organ may provide them with ultimate immunity from law enforcement measures. Under present Russian conditions, the term "immunity" of Duma members is interpreted as impunity for breaking the law, impunity for embezzlement and even for murder. Since its creation in 1993, the present Duma has not allowed a single criminal investigation of any of its members. Parliamentary immunity has prevented investigations against Sergei Stankevich, accused of bribery, and against Sergei Mavrodi, suspected of embezzlement, as well as barring the murder charges that were to be brought against Duma member Viktor Sorochkin (subsequently also murdered).

Experts suggest that at least 10 percent of the deputies in the present parliament have strong ties to Russia's criminal world and it is feared that this percentage will be much higher in the new Duma. The prospect of winning a seat in parliament becomes even more enticing since the new members' mandates will be extended from two- to four-year terms. This extension provides a major incentive for those who are tied to shadow enterprises and to crime. Consequently, the stakes in contending for seats are high. However, the fierce contest for parliamentary seats will take place in relatively confined political parameters. If, yesterday, politicians who had lost a campaign were still able to maintain their visibility on the streets, by holding rallies or organizing demonstrations;
today it is almost certain that the losers in elections are doomed to become "political corpses."

**Where Are Left and Right?**

More than 260 parties have been registered with the Russian Ministry of Justice. Surveys and polls suggest that the Russian electorate is not really well acquainted with any of the parties, movements or blocs. Parties with higher visibility include the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR - Vladimir Zhirinovsky), the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF - Gennadi Zyuganov), and Yabloko (Grigori Yavlinsky). However, only between 30 and 35 percent of the population are familiar even with these three political formations. Between 17 and 20 percent have heard of Russia's Democratic Choice (RDC - Yegor Gaidar), of the Russian Agrarian Party (RAP - Mikhail Lapshin), and of Russia's Women (Ekaterina Lakhova). Ten percent of the electorate know of Democratic Russia (Lev Ponomarev), the Russian Democratic Party (RDP - Sergei Glaz'yev, and Stanislav Govorukhin), and Forward Russia! (Boris Fedorov). Less than five percent of the population are familiar with other political parties. It is noteworthy that this poll was conducted prior to the creation of the two "centrist" blocs -- Our Home is Russia (OHR - Viktor Chernomyrdin) and Ivan Rybkin's bloc (still without a name).

It is almost impossible to locate all the fluctuating components of Russian politics on the traditional political axis, where the left, the right, and the center represent clear and stable political entities and agendas. The notions of "right" and "left" in Russia are constantly switching places. The greatest difficulty in placing parties on the traditional axis derives from the inconsistencies in their programs. A party might publish a political agenda which would be contradicted by the speeches of its leader; the political aspirations of the latter might be unrelated both to agendas and to speeches. In this context, Zhirinovsky comes to mind, whose "liberal democrats" have nothing in common either with democracy or with liberalism.
Another reason why it is so difficult to define different political blocs relates to the eclectic nature of their ideologies--or simply a lack thereof. Furthermore, all the parties are eager to convince the electorate that they are striving for "a socially oriented economy"; in other words every leader is trying to portray him or herself as a social democrat. Zhirinovsky particularly exploits this term. Finally, all the politicians are promising to build a strong state and to resurrect Russia's "greatness." Therefore, the political axis should be viewed as a relative notion. Perhaps a paradigm of two axes--one with respect to the social orientation of the parties, their perception of democracy, and their attitude toward the market, and the other, related to "patriotism," the "national idea," and "statehood"--would allow a somewhat clearer distinction of Russia's political forces.

The Axis of "Social Orientation"
On the very left flank stand the controversial figure of Eduard Limonov and his dwarf-party of national-Bolsheviks, as well as Viktor Anpilov, the leader of the street vandals and drunkards organized in the Labor Russia party. The Bolsheviks led by Nina Andreeva are also clustered at the same end. These groups represent Russia's political rabble and have no realistic chance in the elections. However, there are more serious candidates on the left. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) numbers more than 500,000 members, according to its leader Zyuganov. With a powerful net of regional organizations, Zyuganov's party is the best organized. The results from recent regional elections showed that the communists should not be underestimated, since they won in most of the areas. However, their "Achilles heel" is the crisis of their ideology. It is not easy to reconcile the old communist ideas (which are still very much supported by party members) with the realities established by the market economy. It would also have to bring into accord ideas of "proletarian internationalism" and of "patriotism" as well as reconciling ideas of "private property" and "social equality."

A little closer to the center, but still very close to Zyuganov, stand the agrarians. The Russian Agrarian Party (Lapshin) constitutes one of the larger groups in the present Duma. The backbone of this party consists of the leaders of Russian collective farms,
on whom the population of the countryside remains entirely dependent. The inhabitants of the countryside will vote for whomever they are told to support. The communists and the agrarians do not need to form a single bloc in the upcoming Duma elections: Both parties know that they can count on each other when it comes to contesting the single-member okrugs (districts). They will always agree between themselves whose candidates will contest which okrug, and they will always vote as a bloc in the Duma and probably also in the upcoming presidential elections, scheduled for next June. Both are nostalgic about the past and are striving for its revival, although in a somewhat revised version. Each also advocates the return of a "state-regulated and planned economy."

Those who call themselves social democrats (led by Lyudmila Valtazarova and Aleksandr Yakovlev) may be placed closer to the center on this axis. Their number, however, is relatively low, as is their popularity; therefore it is unrealistic to assume that they will have a viable chance in the elections. A party with a similar profile, but with considerably higher visibility, is the Party of Self-Governing Workers, whose leader, Svetoslav Fedorov, a world-renowned ophthalmologist, declares that labor unions (collectives) should have property rights. Although his narrow political appeal is unlikely to draw very many voters, leaders like Fedorov are becoming more popular. The public admires distinguished professionals who know how to do their job, and instinctively hopes that they could demonstrate the same level of professionalism in politics.

The "center" in the Russian political spectrum is a concept that lacks clarity. Assuming that "centrists" are the forces that avoid the extremes in politics, there are two political blocs which view themselves in this manner. The Kremlin advisors Georgi Satarov and Mark Urnov have proposed and structured a "right center" and a "left center." The speaker of the Duma, Rybkin, was chosen to preside over the "left center," immediately identified as "the second party of power" that would play opposition to the Chernomyrdin bloc--viewed as "the first party of power." Regardless of the fact that Boris Yeltsin had announced that he associated himself with both blocs, from the first days of its creation Rybkin's bloc proved to be a weak alternative to the "right center" since it lacked a new
ideology and appropriate tactics for the campaign. His bloc's performance turned out to be just another repetition of old slogans and ideas. Despite Rybkin's considerable popularity as a politician, his bloc continues to be depleted. Initially it was composed mostly of small parties with a social-democratic orientation, plus the official labor unions, but the unions recently have announced that they are leaving the bloc and would run either as "independents" or together with communists in the single-member constituencies. Rybkin's position was weakened when General Boris Gromov first joined the bloc and then left it. Gromov's popularity derives from the fact that he had dared to criticize Pavel Grachev for his actions in the Chechen campaign. However, even with him, the chances of the "left center" had been quite slim.

The "right center." Our Home is Russia (OHR) led by Chernomyrdin, has higher ratings, especially after defusing the Budennovsk hostage crisis. His bloc unites representatives of regional and Moscow government administrations as well as heads of large state enterprises. The nomenklatura has never been liked in Russia, and Chernomyrdin's political formation was immediately viewed as "the party of bosses." Whether liked or disliked, OHR has all the tools to organize a strong campaign; it could manipulate the elections, starting with the enormous financial resources it has at its disposal and ending with its ability to falsify election results (since the electoral commissions are appointed by the administration). OHR claims that it is for moderate speed with regard to economic reforms and it promises stability--slogans that seem attractive to the electorate. This bloc constitutes an admixture of parties, ranging from communists to radical entrepreneurs. In other words, the idea for a coalition government is embedded in this political group a priori, along with the potential for a subsequent break-up into small mutually hostile factions. A loose coalition in the Russian Duma is doomed to be ineffectual. The country needs politicians who can build a strong team in order to carry out reforms. OHR's appearance provoked the consolidation of new political groups to form a strong opposition to the Chernomyrdin bloc. In many instances some democrats have united with communists and even with "patriots" to fight this "enemy." Nevertheless, political analysts predict victory for Our Home is Russia, which they think would attract 15-20 percent of the votes.
Yabloko could be placed near OHR on this axis. Yavlinsky campaigns for the continuation of reforms with an emphasis on manufacturers' rights. This party does not have a broad network of regional organizations; however, Yavlinsky's personal ratings do not fall far below the most popular leader, General Aleksander Lebed'. Yabloko, which refused to unite with Yegor Gaidar's Russia's Democratic Choice, will enter the election campaign as an independent party. It is impossible to discover differences in their programs, but Yavlinsky, who has always been in opposition to the government, is unwilling to share the responsibility for Gaidar's period of reforms.

Also ideologically akin to Yabloko is the movement Forward Russia! led by Boris Fedorov—a former RDC leader. Both Fedorov and Yavlinsky are fierce critics of the present government as well as of OHR. Yabloko and Forward Russia! have failed to merge only because of the personal political ambitions of their leaders. Gaidar's position in this picture is quite unique. On the one hand, he supports the government's policy while, on the other hand, he opposes the Chechen campaign. The latter was the reason why Fedorov indicated support for RDC. Nevertheless, Gaidar's party is in dire straits nowadays; some of its regional organizations have left and joined OHR. Those which did not join OHR have no chance to pass the five percent barrier, without which it is impossible to secure seats from the "federal list" (the 225 mandates of which are allocated by proportional representation); of course, seats may still be won in some of the 225 single-member constituencies. Apparently, RDC will have to team up with someone else in the campaign, and it would not be surprising if it chooses OHR.

Finally, the far right end of the axis is occupied by the Party for Economic Freedom (PEF) and its leader Konstantin Borovoi. Only this party had the courage to state that its goal is to "build capitalism." Naturally, such a straight admission has doomed its chances for success in the elections.

It would be futile even to attempt to find a place on this axis for the various and numerous "patriotic" parties, primarily because their views on economic reforms and the
market are utterly unclear. The "patriotic forces," however, require separate attention since their influence is constantly growing.

**The Axis of "Patriotism"**

This axis includes political groups ranging from extreme radical "nationalists" to more moderate "patriots." Political parties that play or manipulate the patriotic card seem to be attracting the electorate more and more. The extremists in this spectrum are the fascists, consisting of the Party of Russian National Unity (PRNU - Aleksandr Barkashov), the Russian National Republican Party (RNRP - Nikolai Lysenko), and the Russian National Council (RNC - Aleksandr Sterligov, a former KGB general). Despite the fact that these parties are in constant conflict with one another, they might unite over their shared ideology: All of them abhor the West, hate foreigners, and divide nations between superior (the Russians) and inferior peoples (all the rest). The former democrat Sergei Baburin, who leads the Russian National Union (RNU), should also be included in this group. It is unlikely that the radical-nationalists will have much of a chance in the parliamentary elections. Their extremism shocks and repels rather than attracting attention. Most of their followers, however, are among the younger generation; therefore, it would not be wise to discount these "brown" parties entirely.

Zhirinovsky and his party of "liberal democrats" is not very distant from the radical nationalists on the "patriotic axis." Today his party is less powerful than before. Its leader no longer has the allure of the new unorthodox politician; he has become far too annoying with his posturing and theatrics in the Duma and elsewhere. However, Zhirinovsky's popularity is unshaken in many large cities, especially in the southern parts of Russia. Unlike the rest of the radicals, the LDPR claims to favor equality for the nationalities in the country, but at the same time declares that the Russian people should be viewed as "first among equals." Occasionally Zhirinovsky may become involved in heated polemics with Zyuganov and other communists, but the results of the regional elections showed that he does not mind uniting with them when victory is at stake.
There is a point on this axis where "patriots" turn into "statesmen." The Derzhava (State Power) party, led by Aleskandr Rutskoi the former vice president and a former prisoner after the failed 1993 coup, is still popular. He travels around the country, giving dramatic speeches full of promises to restore order. The center of his rhetoric is that Russia, as a state, is superior to the West. Based on this assumption, Rutskoi promises the electorate to "bring the West to its knees." Derzhava and LDPR have a lot in common, and it would not be surprising for Rutskoi's party to obtain seats in the Duma if it manages to team up with a powerful bloc in the election campaign.

The Congress of Russia's Communities (CRC) unites more moderate and balanced "patriots" and "statesmen." CRC's influence and popularity was considerably increased when General Lebed' joined it. If elections were to take place today, this party's victory might be overwhelming. However, time is not on Lebed's side. After leaving the 14th Army in Dniester, his former image as a fearless Grachev opponent does not fit his civilian clothes anymore. The main theme in the CRC program is that (Russian) compatriots living in the "near abroad" and their rights must be protected. However, the strength of this organization lies not in its political agenda, but rather in Lebed's personality.

Indeed, one of the main characteristics of the upcoming elections is the fact that voters will not be giving their support to parties, but to personalities. According to a recent poll conducted by the "Public Opinion Fund" concerning who should be Russia's president, respondents chose Lebed' by a large margin. When the name of the former general was coupled with another politician the results came out as follows:

Lebed'-38%; Yel'tsin-8%
Lebed'-42%; Zhirinovsky 11%
Lebed'-33%; Yavlinsky 20%
Lebed'-31%; Chernomyrdin 23%
(the rest of the respondents were undecided)
Election day is the only time when power will be in the hands of the people. It is already clear that half of the eligible voters will not use this power. The masses have lost hope and trust in politics, and their disappointment has led to apathy. The Duma elections are just a prelude to the presidential race. The results in December will provide an indicator of whether presidential elections will take place on time and in accordance with the Constitution.

Note:
1. Yabloko's title might require change since Yuri Boldyrev, the "B" in the name, has left the party.

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