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Russian Federation Takes Over

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Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology & Policy

Russian President Boris Yel'tsin established a new structure of executive power in a decree issued on November 6, 1991, aimed at consolidating the control and implementation of reform policies and facilitating the transfer of power from union ministries and administrative bodies to their Russian counterparts. This decree, "On the Organization of the Work of the RSFSR Government Under the Conditions of Economic Reform," established Yel'tsin as Prime Minister of the Russian government, which includes also the first deputy chairman of the Russian Federation, deputy chairmen of the Russian Federation, presidents of the republics within the Russian Federation, and Russian Federation ministers.(1)

In selecting members of the government, Yel'tsin relied primarily on young scholars and former associates from Sverdlovsk. The first deputy chairman, Gennadi Burbulis, is a former professor of philosophy who was elected as USSR People's Deputy from Sverdlovsk oblast' in 1989; he also managed Yel'tsin's campaign for election to the RSFSR presidency. Despite his close connections with Yel'tsin, Burbulis has described their relations as "bumpy;" still, he cites Yel'tsin's willpower, intelligence and empathy as the foundation of his support of the president.(2)

Burbulis is tasked with the appointments of deputy ministers and "leaders" of management organs and state committees. He also shares coordination and oversight responsibilities for Russian ministries with the deputy chairmen, Yegor Gaidar and Aleksandr Shokhin, and with the more recently appointed vice chairman, Sergei

Shakhrai.(3) Burbulis retains his former title of State Secretary and presumably the incumbent responsibilities to coordinate Russian foreign and domestic policies.

Yegor Gaidar, who was head of the USSR Institute of Economic Policy at the time of his appointment, developed the economic program embraced by Yel'tsin and has assembled an economic team drawn from former associates at the institute to oversee implementation of the reforms. His task includes coordination with Aleksandr Shokhin, who supervises ministries in both the social and economic spheres. Shokhin had been RSFSR Minister of Labor and one-time economic adviser to USSR Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.(4)

Sergei Shakhrai, Russian State Councillor for legal affairs and former chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Committee for Legislation, was appointed vice chairman in December. His work in the Russian parliament included the development of election laws and the legislation creating the Russian presidency. As vice chairman, Shakhrai continues to develop state and legal policies and assists in the preparation of presidential decrees in addition to supervising the Ministry of Justice (which had been assigned to Burbulis), the security ministries and the State Committee for Nationalities Policies.(5)

The provisions for ministerial oversight in the restructuring of the Russian government were written in accordance with the proposal before the USSR State Council to abolish 80 union ministries and administrative organs, which was approved at the November 14 session of the USSR State Council. On November 15, President Yel'tsin issued a series of decrees and resolutions including the assumption of all property, buildings and materials of the abolished union ministries on RSFSR territory by the appropriate Russian organs, the cessation of funding for union ministries except those transferred to Russian jurisdiction, and the incorporation of the Ministry of Finance and the state mint into a reconfigured Russian Ministry of Economics and Finance.(6)

On November 22, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet approved a resolution incorporating Gosbank and Vneshekonombank into a Russian Central Bank responsible for monetary policy. On November 30, after consulting with USSR President Gorbachev and the director of Gosbank, Yel'tsin announced that Russia would assume responsibility for the union budget through the end of 1991, guaranteeing payments, among others, to the military and scientific sectors.

The signing of the agreement on the Commonwealth of Independent States quickly brought what remained of the union structures under Russian authority. The USSR Foreign Ministry was dissolved by decree of the Russian President on December 18 with the stipulation that the coordination of foreign affairs among Commonwealth members would be determined at an upcoming meeting.⁽⁷⁾ Russian funding of the military, coupled with the decision by Commonwealth members to retain unified control over strategic armed forces, ensured the support of the military, further cementing the demise of the union. The transfer of authority from the USSR Ministry of Defense has only been agreed upon temporarily, however. Marshal Shaposhnikov was named interim Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth forces pending resolution of the contentious question of the creation of republican armies.

The Russian government's process of absorbing the additional responsibilities associated with the transfer of authority from the former union ministries, departments and administrative organs placed the supervision of former Soviet bureaucratic activities under the jurisdiction of Russian officials who are likewise responsible for coordinating the implementation of economic and social reforms. In a period of radical political and economic transition, this may prove to be an effective means of creating and organizing policy. However, the rapid development of the Russian executive administration has led to overlapping spheres of authority among both individual ministers and state organs. Their responsibilities may need to be more clearly demarcated if duplication and confusion are not to reduce governmental effectiveness. Moreover, Yel'tsin has followed Gorbachev's unfortunate precedent of surrounding himself with an unofficial crew of

personal aides who often disregard the functions of the Russian cabinet and parliament, thus complicating the situation further.

Division of Ministerial Oversight in the Russian Federation

GENNADI BURBLES

State Secretary

First Deputy Chairman

(Appointed 11/11/91)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Press and Mass Information

*Ministry of Justice

YEGOR GAIDAR

Deputy Chairman

(Appointed 11/11/91)

Ministry of Economy and Finance

Ministry of Industry

Ministry of Agriculture

Ministry of Transport

Ministry of Fuel and Power

Ministry of Trade and Material Resources

Ministry of Geology and Use of Natural Resources

Ministry of Communications

Ministry of Architecture, Construction, Housing and Municipal Services

SERGEI SHAKHRAI

State Councillor

Vice Chairman

(Appointed 12/14/91)

Ministry of Internal Affairs

*Ministry of Justice

Federal Security Agency

ALEKSANDR SHOKHIN

Deputy Chairman

(Appointed 11/11/91)

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Labor and Employment of the Population

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Culture

Ministry of Social Protection of the Population

Ministry of Science and Technical Policy

* Apparent duplication of assigned jurisdiction.

Notes:

1TASS, 6 November 1991, cited in FBIS-SOV-91-216, pp. 49-50.

2Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, Federal Information Systems Corp., October 28, 1991 -- Nexis data service.

3*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 15 November 1991, cited in FBIS-SOV-91-223, p. 55.

4GOLOS, p. 2, from Soviet Press Digest, November 18, 1991 -- Nexis data service.

5Interfax, 14 December 1991, cited in FBIS-SOV-91-241, p. 44.

6TASS, 17 November 1991, cited in FBIS-SOV-91-223, 224.

7Interfax, 19 December 1991, cited in FBIS-SOV-91-245, p. 32.

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