PRESIDENCY AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA
Introduction

The concept of civil society today, in its normative sense is more or less direct translation of Cicero’s ‘societal civilis’ of thirteenth century (Chandhoke 1995: 82). In seventeenth century, John Locke reflected this idea forcefully in his ‘Two Treatises on Civil Government’. For him, the establishment of civil society rests on the ‘act of will’ (Locke 1962: 194). Upholding the Lockean principle of freedom, Hegel defines civil society, as a ‘form of ethical life’ (Hegel 1983: 546-552).\(^1\) Contrary to Lock’s view, Marx considers ‘civil society as bourgeois society’. He presented the most trenchant criticism of bourgeois civil society, where the individual right to property was seen as the right to selfishness, and the society based on these rights was believed to lead ‘not to the realization, but to the limitation of individual freedom’\(^2\). Gramsci, a Marxian while deviating from Marx, sees civil society in the light of the State = Political society + Civil society (the State is the combination of both political society and civil society). While the political society is the arena of coercion and domination, civil society is ‘the arena of consent and freedom’ (Gramsci 1983: 186).

The contribution of John Keane, the contemporary political scientist is more precise and relevant in modern context of democracy and civil society. Through his two writings, ‘Democracy and Civil society’\(^3\) and ‘Civil society and the State’,\(^4\) he attempted to maintain balance between the state and non-state institutions. He cautions that the whole solution to the problem of democracy and social justice does not lie in the non-state sphere of institutions of civil society. He rather maintains that both state and civil society must become the condition of each other’s democratisation. In Democracy and Civil Society, he writes “I am arguing that without a secure and independent civil society of autonomous public sphere, goals such as freedom and equality, participatory planning and community decision making will be nothing but empty slogans. Without the protective, redistributive and conflict

---


mediating functions of the state, struggles to transform civil society will become ghettoized, divided and stagnant” (Keane 1988a: 3). He further contends that civil society can and should also function as a public sphere to check the powers of the state.

Civil society is neither public nor private, perhaps represents both at once under the banner of ‘third way’ (Faux 1999: 67-76). Civil society plays a significant role in building up a concrete democratic political order. No political system or institution can exist without civil society, which is the foremost requirement for its existence. Yeltsin, the first Russian president and the architect of the Russian constitution insisted that strong presidential power could only compensate for the weakness of democracy in a country accustomed to tsars and leaders, in which defined group interests are not yet clearly established. Today, Presidency is considered the centre around which the Russian society revolves. Keeping these points in mind, this chapter attempts to understand the interaction between the Presidency institution and the Russian civil society within the frame work of Democracy.

(I)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Edward Shills define civil society as a process of development of the society to achieve the higher extent of civility’ (Shills 1991: 19). This process of development in ‘civility’ in Russian society can be traced back to the intellectual and cultural progress during the nineteenth century particularly 1861 Peasant reforms, when modernizing process of the society began (Keep 1980: 197-272). The 1861 peasant movement led to the intellectual search for a model of development. In this process, a situation developed that was quite paradoxical: the “movement towards the transformation of the state, a vital necessity, was led by the state itself” (Golankova et al. 1996: 12). Although, the autocratic monarchy was forced to make these changes, one of the forces driving this change was the distinct social and intellectual structure
existing in Russia, i.e. the Russian intelligentsia. It was indeed, this intelligentsia, which developed and introduced the fundamental ideas and concepts of civil society, rights and liberties of individuals and equality before law into the public consciousness.

By the end of the nineteenth century, liberal philosophers exerted considerable influence on Russian society. Some of them were B. N. Chicherin, P. N. Norgorodtev, L. Petrazhitski, B. Kistiakovskii, and S. Gessen, who fought for the separation of laws from politics, drawing a clear distinction between laws as universal principles of justice and politics as a system of administrative and government ordinances (Golankov et al. 1996: 14). For them, law was above the state. The task of the law was to protect the individual from the coercion of an outside force that is the state.

In 1917, the ‘third estate’ and the ‘middle stratum’ were very weak in Russia. Political parties, social movements and other organisations were still in their initial stages. The Bolsheviks who captured power in 1917 had no programmes for the development of this middle stratum. Their experience of parliamentary and state activities was quite limited. The internal and external conditions were not conducive for the evolution of the civil society. These conditions served simultaneously both as a catalyst for the development of civil society and a peculiar obstacle to it as well (Krasin 1993: 52).

In the early years of Bolshevism, attempts were made to resolve the task of transition to socialism by consolidating dictatorship in order to initiate socialist transformation from the top by the means of ‘universal statisation’ (Krasin 1993: 52). This rigid model of state socialism blocked the democratic culture of civil consensus and contained seeds of totalitarianism. During the period of Stalinist despotism, the elements of market structure, peasant economy, independent trade unions, and entrepreneurial groups and other associations were destroyed. Socio-economic support for the crystallization of collective social interests and the creation of corresponding non-state organisations that enjoyed trust from the below ceased to exist.
Period of Transition

The sphere of civil society that was separated from the state became very much relevant in Soviet Russia by 1980s, as a result of the negative effects of the rigid economic, socio-political and legal system, and also due to the ideological uniformity. This led intellectuals and political leaders to take initiative and attempt was made to restrict the sphere of intervention by the state and by other political factors into economic and social lives. Thus, the civil society in Russia became a paradigm in determining the possible direction of social reforms. It expressed the need and direction of change as an alternative. Therefore, the “civil society was reborn in the Russian culture as a democratic alternative to the authoritarian socialism” (Golenkova 1999: 10).

Gorbachev’s policy of reforms i.e. perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness), paved the way for the dramatic changes towards democratic governance. It was these two policies, which laid down the foundations for the process of democratization in Russian society. The introduction of parliamentary system, elected presidency, judiciary, free and independent media, and the development of civil society will go a long way in building democratic culture of Russia. Though, the existing political structure of Russia is not democratic by western standards, it is far more democratic than the previous one. This new political system appears more in tune with the democratic aspirations of the Russian masses. Thus, a new era has begun in the history of building a democratic state based on civil freedom and rule of law in Russia. With this, the very nature of the power structure and constitutional system have changed and acquired a democratic face.

Gorbachev’s reforms facilitated the reinvigoration of the voluntary sector of the Russian society (Tismaneanu and Turner 1995: 17). Innumerable dissident groups emerged in legitimate shape as informal organisations and associations, which began to function openly. This period of transition led to the growth of a highly ‘politicised civil society’ (Srivastava 1999: 8) and became important channel rallying anti-communist, anti-socialist political forces and against the political society represented by the party and the state leadership.

Beginning with the perestroika, certain new social and political forces were looking forward to reform the political system within the existing paradigm of
socialism and under the leadership of Gorbachev. These articulate segments of the society, particularly some sections of intelligentsia, played a vital role in mobilizing the support for anti-CPSU political forces. Thus, civil society came to be identified with anti-establishment social and political forces (ibid 1999: 8). It played a key role not only in harbouring anti-Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) forces but also essentially wrecking the political existing society and the political system as a whole.

Moreover, with the impending collapse of Soviet state, it opened the gate for a diverse organizational structure to come up. The transformation of civil society was accompanied by major changes in the socio-economic structure. Boikov (1996: 36) says, “The social changes taking place in Russia represent a radical break of social relations and the transformation of economic and political structures, with these in turn causing substantial alterations in the way of life, consciousness, and the behavior of large masses of people”. One of the reasons behind these changes is a new consciousness among the vast majority of Russians, that the ideological, political and cultural self-isolation of Russia is no more possible (Vorontsova and Filatov 1997: 19).

(II)

POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The post-Soviet Russian society in the short span of just one and half decade shows at least some positive features of the development of civil society (third sector). This reflects the existence of a ‘civic culture’, that shows the democratization of the political system (elections, multi-party system and opposition); an open society of pluralism and diversity (free press, voluntary groups and associations which challenge the state action) in the social setting as against the previous closed system. Moreover, this period saw and privatization and liberalization of economic system (freedom of contract and competition in the market). However, all these features cannot guarantee the sustenance and furtherance of a mature civil society.
Emergence of Civil Society in Post Soviet Russia

The 1993 constitution of Russian Federation guarantees the rights and liberties of the individual under Articles 17-46. It recognises the principle of equality and self-determination of people. Experience shows that people become more assertive and expressive about their needs and demand when their rights and liberties are protected by the law of the land. Today, numerous independent associations, organisations and movements exist in Russian society, which compete among themselves for the right to represent the people (Golenkova 1999: 10). Individuals and social groups are becoming aware of the necessity to organise and strengthen civil society. The new Russia is marked by the growing enthusiasm for development of the structures of civil society. Multiple factors are responsible for this growing aspiration. Under the Soviet Union economic stagnation was acute, crisis of governance became pervasive and the sphere of management and distribution were at cross roads.

The rigid social and ideological uniformity of the Soviet era made it compulsory to search for an alternative democratic civil society. At the same time, international pressure to build a stable world of democratic order activated this process (Kurtz and Barnes 2002: 529). This objective of the worldwide democratic movement, that sought to create a “civilised society” in which the well-being of citizens would be secured, their rights would be guaranteed, and culture, science and art would be supported at the requisite level became the goal of Russia as well. All of these became the guiding principles of the 1993 constitutional arrangement for a federal assembly, judiciary and local self-government.

Social Structure in Post Soviet Russia

The post soviet Russia witnessed a transformation in Russian society, which left enormous impact on its social structure. In a sense, the relationship between property and power determined both political and social strata. The stratification of Soviet society was mostly determined by the 'political capital' (Zaslavskaya 1997: 7), which was defined by the place of social groups in the polity-state hierarchy. ‘Political capital’ refers to the place of individuals and groups in the system of power and administration. It predetermined not only the volume of distributive rights they

\[ 5 \text{ For detail see Russian Constitution.} \]
had, and the level of decisions made, but also the range of social connections and the scale of informal opportunities.

The shift to political pluralism and market economy in new Russia characterises the transformation of social stratification. The process of change in social structure is quite complex, because the destruction of old social relationship goes ahead of the formation of new ones. A new stratified society and new social groups have emerged on the scene. In the new social setting, mass strata become marginalised, the 'social bottom' tends to expand, and the economic relations are more criminalised. According to Zaslavskaya (1997: 7), the Russian society consists of four recognised social classes. These are: the upper, middle, basic and lower classes. This new classification makes a departure from the old Marxist classification of all the societies into two classes.

This categorization defines the 'upper stratum', primarily as the ruling class (bourgeoisie). It comprises the elites and sub-elite groups that are most prominent in the system of state government and economic and power structure. The second stratum in the classification stands for the 'middle class'. It is very small in numbers, but they are the guarantors of social stability. This includes petty businessmen, managers of middle and minor enterprises, specialists and professionals. The third one is the 'basic stratum' that is unique to Russian landscape. It comprises of more than two-third of the Russian population and includes major part of intelligentsia (the semi-intelligentsia), white-collar workers and major part of the peasantry. The last one in the classification is the 'lower stratum' of society that includes the victims, mostly the elderly people, poorly educated, the unemployed, and refugees (ibid, 1997: 10-11).

Elites: The elite structures of the upper stratum are the owners and controllers of power in political space and capital in the economy. Peculiar relationship between the bourgeoisie (economic elites) and the state apparatus developed through the process of privatisation. By introducing and implementing privatisation programmes, the government passed the state resources into the non-state hands. Privatization process effectively guaranteed privileges to a significant part of the old Soviet ruling elites. Legalising the passing of former state property into the hands of the elites provided
the material basis, on which an emergent bourgeoisie could develop. In all these, the state acted as the ‘midwife’ and provided bourgeoisie with the resources it needed to develop (Gill 1998: 320). The intimacy of this functional link between the bourgeoisie and the state is reflected very clearly by the state’s direct involvement in commercial concerns through appointment of prominent businessmen to leading ranks of administration, which was common throughout the Yeltsin period.

This sort of picture of close relationship between government and business houses is not unusual in the Western societies. However, the situation in Russia is different. Political institutions are still at a relatively early stage of development. Instead of interactions between a mature democratic institutions with powerful business interests (as in the West), Russia has immature institutions to cope with an increasingly powerful business sector (ibid, 1998: 328). It is still in the process of state building, and substantial influence of business can have a significant formative effect on institutions.

**Middle Class:** In discussing prospects for democracy, scholars have often pointed to the importance of the middle class and its weakness in Russia. Middle class relies upon individualism and on organizations, independent of the state. Groups within the middle class create their own associations, in which they seek to structure their professional lives. The foundation of these collective bodies designed to protect their professional interests is seen as one of the traits of the middle class life. From this point of view, middle class is the essence of ‘civil society’, which in turn is perceived as central to democratic life (Srivastava 1999: 9).

The role played by the middle stratum in the transformation of society is determined by its high professional and qualification potential, the ability to adapt to the changing conditions, active participation in the transformation of obsolete societal institutions, relatively favourable material positions, and interest in continuing the reforms. Inspite of its small numbers in present day Russia, it is both social base and principal vehicle of reforms that are implemented predominantly owing to its efforts. If the upper stratum embodies society’s will and goal setting, the middle stratum is the bearer of the energy of masses (Zaslavkaya 1997: 11).
Basic and lower class: The fundamental characteristic of the basic stratum is that it possesses an average professional qualification potential. Their efforts are mostly directed not towards transformation of reality according to individual interests but adaptation of those changes, which took place on the initiative of others. Primarily, it includes adaptation to the changing conditions, in order to survive. With lesser possibility of realising their goal, this basic stratum mobilises to express their opposition through mass social protest, in its most acute forms. Where as the lower stratum reflect a low potential of activity and inability to adapt to the rigid socio-economic conditions, the principal characteristic that differentiates the lower class from others is their isolation from the institutions of larger part of the society.

The proportion of these classes in the total population has been identified as 1: 24: 68: 7 out of 100, respectively in their hierarchy from upper, middle, basic and finally to the lower classes in 1995 (Zaslavkaya 1997: 15). The proportion shows the upper and middle strata, which are the prime vehicles of socio-political development and guarantor of economic stability, account for a quarter of the total population.

In the developed countries of the West, middle class consists of similar socio-professional groups and constitutes a major part of the population, which occupies a significantly higher position. In Russia, the groups formed by middle class are less developed, possessing other socio-cultural characteristics and they occupy the status that is much lower to that of their counterparts in the West. However, their role in the development of society and in the process of transformation is quite remarkable and they will be much more influential in the future.
(III)

RUSSIAN STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

State and Society Relationship

The separation of an emerging articulate society and a dominant state is more analytical than empirical in Post-Soviet Russia. Establishment and maintenance of a clear boundary between what constitutes the state and what constitutes a society requires, "emphasise the role of society in hindering or facilitating the development of an effective state" (Migdal 1998: 3-40). In this account, the state has been treated as an agent that voluntarily situates itself within the society in an attempt to transform the society and to achieve its policy objectives. It advocates an explicitly 'state in society' approach for a more balanced view of state-societal relations in which their interaction is treated as recursive and mutually transforming as well as potentially empowering (Migdal 1994: 7-34). Yet, state and society remain depicted as separate and competing entities engaged in the continuous struggle for domination.

The blurred boundary between the state and society in post-Soviet Russia is an integral part of the state building process to develop a ruling apparatus that is separate from the society, in order to establish and maintain a legal-rational order (Grzymala-Bussee and Luong 2002: 534). A clear boundary between 'state' and 'society' appeared gradually in Western societies, but in Russia, enough time has not passed for a clear distinction to emerge and consolidate. The focus of this discussion is on the structure of the state and its relationship with the society. The state structure constitutes a common set of formal institutions, including Constitution, Parliament and Bureaucracy. Formal practices and structures of the state authority consist of officials, written-down rules, contract enforcement, redistribution and the designated organisations that serve and enforce these rules. On the contrary, the societal sphere includes those informal practices that occur outside these formal channels. These informal practices and structures are neither codified nor sanctioned officially. It consists of shared understandings rather than formal rules and personal agreements. More importantly, these organisations without necessary legal recognition or legitimate power can serve as the basis for extracting and allocating resources.
The juxtaposition of a 'strong state' and a 'weak society' has been a key concept in the analysis of Russian history and politics (Gramsci 1993: 52). The emergence of civil society and its subsequent replacement by state programmes of mobilization of people and the aggrandisement of powers by the state apparatus from above enfeebled the capacity of the civil society for spontaneous evolution. The state appeared to manage such social changes as there were in the Soviet period. It is clear that the forces unleashed by Gorbachev's perestroika and the collapse of Soviet communist system have dealt a massive blow to the 'strong state'. However, “the society has not exactly leapt into the breach opened by the collapse of state power” (Miller 1995: 132).

The professional middle class or the spontaneous public organisations in which Gorbachev placed such faith have proved a disappointment. Since then, organised labour has been conspicuous in its passivity and peasants are reluctant to leave collectives and state farms. Privatisation has proved far more difficult than was envisaged, and political parties are still largely the personal followings of the would-be charismatic leaders. The former nomenklatura has shown remarkable tenacity in hanging to resources, power and privileges (Gill 1998: 80-97).

State and the Political Society

In the post-communist phase, ‘political society’ can not be identified with the definition of Gramsci, who distinguished it from the ‘civil society’. As a part of the state, Gramsci defined ‘political society’ as the sphere of coercion. The post-Soviet Russian political society exists within the society that focuses on political power and also competes to achieve that. The distinction became more prevalent in the early years of post-Soviet Russian political landscape in the process of power struggle between the legislature and the executive in 1993.

The relationship between the state and political society in Russia has become more significant to examine, whether political society dominates the state or vice versa? A clear answer emerges slowly when we mark the failure of the political society, to define and provide a clear structure, and to establish consistent terms of

---

7 Struggle Between Parliament and the President discussed in chapter II and III of this thesis.
relation between society and state. It also fails to institute avenues of influence between emerging socio-economic interests and agencies of public representation. Thus, the post-Soviet Russian political society has been defined by the 'state power’, rather than by the autonomous interests of ‘civil society’ (Urban 1997: 263-67).

Today, the Russian political society has fallen victim to the politics of appropriation. Instead of building a base of support for the political society through consultation and concession, the state (especially the executive) generally ignores the organised political forces altogether. This appropriation of state offices has been something constant in the phase of transition, resulting into fragmentation of the political society that has come into being in Russia.

Opposition

Since 1960s, dissent against the regime’s values and goals were reflected in the statements and actions of individuals and groups, often described as ‘Soviet dissident movement' (Barber 1997: 598). They lacked common objectives and strategy and had little or no impact on Soviet rulers. The projects of perestroika and glasnost created the ‘cultural premises’ for the emergence of the opposition (White 1997: 19-34). In 1988, the radical elements- Social Democrats, Liberals, Christian Democrats and others, formed the Democratic Union (DS), the first group in the USSR since 1921, to declare itself publicly as an opposition. The first phase of the repositioning of opposition in post-Soviet Russia ended when the parliament was bombarded into submission and the leaders of the opposition incarcerated in prison (Barber 1997: 600-605). The main purpose of the new constitution that came into force in 1993 was to minimise the opposition’s ability to obstruct the government’s strategy. Thus, the opposition’s ability to use its majority in parliament to reverse or influence government policy is extremely limited.

Despite continuous adversarial form of the Russian politics, co-operation rather than conflict characterises the relationship between government and opposition. On the one hand, the government has taken up nationalist themes championed by the opposition (such as reintegrating the former Soviet Union, defending the interests of Russians living in the near abroad), while on the other hand, the opposition has accepted the need for a market economy (Barber 1997: 607). This opposition in
Russia is not confined only to main political parties. There is a plethora of political groups in new Russia, including Anarchists, Greens, Monarchists, Neo-Nazis, Syndicalist. Some of them totally reject the existing system. The most potential source of organised opposition was the trade unions. Due to some major limitations, such as government’s control over media, fluidity of socio-economic factors, inequalities in income and wealth, diffused political opposition, the potentiality of Russian society is reflected in its relatively recent advent and the appearance of deep cleavages, lack of cohesion and ineffectiveness.

State Corporatism and Interest Group

In Russia, the state-dependent organisations still play an important role in the processes of political and economic development. This has been termed as ‘corporatism’ or more appropriately ‘state corporatism’ (Schmitter 1974: 85-131). The corporatist approach, in contrast to pluralism emphasizes state’s efforts to penetrate, control or co-opt interest groups in order to limit and contain group competition. According to Schmitter (1974: 93-94), “Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organised into a limited number of singualars. Compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories recognised or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their articulation of demands and supports”. He differentiates corporatism from pluralism. While pluralism is predicated upon a free functioning civil society, corporatism defines efforts by the state to penetrate and shape the civil society.

The existence and predominance of corporatism has been justified by some scholars as a long-term strategy, which is more important and necessary for a transitional society like Russia. It is believed that class harmony is vital for society and can only be secured by the institutional arrangements, tying organised groups to the state. Secondly, state control can foster orderly participation, which is the key to establishing political stability in the period of turbulence (Kubicek 1999: 30). After all, it should be clear that corporatism need not imply total control of associations by
the state authorities. These groups are afforded a role, albeit with limited autonomy within a prescribed structure.

Despite the presence of some pluralist features, state corporatists are strong and are the defining features of state-interest group relationship. State ownership and inadequate development of individual interests in groups in new Russia has weakened interest groups and made it difficult to establish corporatist-social partnership. Also, the unions have not been able to articulate their positions clearly on some key questions. In the backdrop of such a complex situation, David Ost says that 'a gaping hole' exists, where independent interest groups should be organized because the state continues to dominate many associations (Ost 1993: 453-485).

**Elite competition**

Scholars of the developing countries have recognized the formal structures of colonialism, which shaped the subsequent state-building process; the post-communist experience illustrates that both formal and informal legacies act as important constraints on state formation, because they constitute the primary resources available to elites competing for authority (Grzymala and Luong 2002: 534). Elites are predominant in this multi-dimensional institutes of influences, which is described as 'state building', a product of 'elite competition'.

Elite competition for power includes a wide range of competitors such as individuals, groups and organisations, Mafiosi, Oligarchs, political and economic elites, traditional leaders, criminal syndicates, interest groups, social movements, political parties, economic and social networks. Voluntary organisations of society into distinct and discernable groups create potential constituencies and increase the subsequent likelihood for representative competition. Crucial to these organisations is the degree of distinction between state and society. Voluntarily organised social groups offer a strong incentive for entrepreneurial elites to serve their representatives with ability to provide a ready-made basis for social support.

The mechanisms by which prior mobilisation is likely to translate into subsequent representative competition are two fold. 1) They function as potential constituencies, reducing the barriers to mobilisation. 2) Presence of explicitly organised social groups can also compel elites to recognise the fact that their own
political success depends on winning the favour of these groups. Thus, as Grzymala-Busse and Luong (2002: 537) says 'popular mobilisation can act as an effective check on elite behaviour.

These 'representative elites' compete on behalf of popular constituency seeking to establish their authority. Unlike 'representative elites', another form of elites known as 'self-contained elites' also exists, who compete only among themselves to establish their authority, with little reference or appeal to outside groups and constituencies without explicit or organised support base. Russian leaders are a part of these self-contained elites.

Oligarchs

Yeltsin ensured himself extraordinary power after violent dissolution of parliament in 1993. He actively promoted the break up of economic monopoly control by state, only to create a new private monopoly controlled by selected band of financiers and bankers. New financial-political elite has come into existence, which has major stake in political economic system of Russia. The emergence of oligarchs can be particularly linked to this process of economic transition that took place in the initial phase characterised by policy specifics of 'shock therapy'. That was intended to transform Russia into a developed capitalist economy at one go (Gidhadubli and Sampatkumar 2000: 2512-2514). Today, in Russia these oligarchs are known as monopolists, who are associated with corruption and crime.

During Yeltsin's presidency, there was a nexus between the oligarchs and the political power groups, both supporting each other and benefiting from each other. Example of this nexus can be seen from the presidential election in 1996 that Yeltsin won with the help of oligarchs, who feared that Zyuganov victory will threaten their ill-gotten wealth (Wolosky 2000: 18-31). Yeltsin, whose approval ratings by January 1996 sank to 5 percent surprisingly recovered within no time and won the election. The oligarchs not only funded Yeltsin's campaign by pumping in millions of dollars but also used the media power totally owned by them. This helped to turn the tide in his favour against the strong communist candidate Gennady Zyuganov, who lacked media support to influence public opinion, a "sordid tactics that made the election a dubious example of democracy in action" (Kort 2001: 411).
Expectedly, the conduct of 2000 presidential election campaign was also criticised by some foreign observers, particularly for the pro-government bias of the media controlled by oligarchs. However, the little consolation Putin got was the post-election observers reports, which endorsed the election as substantially free, as the episodic violation of electoral procedure were deemed not sufficient to alter the outcome (Rutland 2000: 313-354).

Putin, unlike Yeltsin, even before coming to the office, made a strong rhetoric on ‘the rule of law’ and building ‘the strong state’, infusing some hope amidst scepticism on his ability to take on the oligarchs. Living up to his words, he went ahead to tame the oligarchs. One of the Putin’s first assaults on the oligarch was the arrest of Russian oligarch Vladimir Gussinsky in June 2000, within few weeks of his formally assuming the office of the presidency.

The arrest of Gussinsky gained high publicity and debate in Russia and elsewhere. For the west, Gussinsky symbolises free enterprise, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. His arrest was seen as Putin’s intolerance of media since Gussinsky represented the only independent media conglomerate in Russia (Gidadhubli, and Sampatkumar 2000: 2512-2514).

Meanwhile, there were different reactions in Russia. Firstly, it was seen as a Putin going back to soviet style of administration taking away Russia from democracy and the “rule of law”. Secondly, it was seen as a warning against growing power of the oligarchs. Thirdly, the general masses see oligarchs as synonymous with corruption. Hence, they welcome a crack down on these elites. Putin seemingly played this popular sentiment by trying to tackle corruption as his top priority.

Putin’s intention of cracking down on oligarchs was further made clear when his government threatened to start criminal investigation against several other tycoons. Then in his first meeting with the oligarchs in July 2000, he invited twenty-one top businessmen to Kremlin to tell them that they should start paying taxes and create jobs. Putin also blamed them for the corruption in the government and refused to give them outright amnesty but promised not to over turn the post-Soviet privatisation (Radyuhin 2000). However, after his lecture to the magnates, he has done little to make them obey him. Peter Reddaway says that, “his inaction is rather
dictated by the collective desire of most political forces (including bureaucracy) who wish to maintain status-quo” (Reddaway 2002: 31-40).

The nexus between the Yeltsin and the oligarchs, and the inability of Yeltsin and his successive governments to check the oligarch’s corruption and monopolistic perdition, raised serious questions, not only about the prospects for the development of free market and the rule of law but about Russian democracy itself (Wolosky 2000: 18-31). The fresh hope that was infused on Putin assuming power has not been fulfilled. Today, instead of Putin imposing his will upon the oligarchs, some of them are seen as imposing their will on him.

(IV)

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

From theoretical point of view, scholars argue that a substantive democracy can be successful if there are conditions, such as - homogeneity in population, industrial economy, and large middle class (Lijphart 1998: 128-137). However, it is also true that civil society has always seen democracy from a pluralistic point of view. In Russian polity, the existing democratic institutions have been less constructive as they are not able to play the expected contributory role in strengthening the democratic culture. The genuine markers of democracy i.e. the written constitution, federal structure, multi-party system, free media and finally, the electoral process give a mixed picture as far as the democratic set up in Russia is concerned.

Constitutionalism

Transformation of a political system and establishment of a new order under new procedures and codes need the recognition and legitimacy of a constitutional backing. The constitution of 1993 upholds the theory of a democratic, republican, federal and secular form of state based on rule of law. Individual rights are guaranteed in chapter-1 and chapter-2 of the constitution. The constitution also creates a judicial
system for the interpretation and adjudication of constitutional, civil, criminal and administrative cases in different courts. Amendment procedure is properly codified with limited powers to the federal assembly and maximum with the president. Thus, the constitution of 1993 legitimises the authority of a strong Presidency in Russian federation.

Constitutional guarantees for the development of individual and society are the hallmarks of Western model of democratic order which guarantees free elections, multi-party system, and freedom of speech etc. The Constitution of 1993 at least underlines the basic commitment to liberal principles. Article 13 ensures political diversity and multi-party politics, Article 28 freedom of conscience, and right to property under Article 35. The rights and liberties guaranteed to citizens according to constitution are inalienable from the individual (Article 17-32). In respect of associational rights, Article 30 guarantees the freedom of association and peaceful assembly. These provisions reflect the existence of some kind of political foundation for the civil society in contemporary Russia, although they are not properly developed and institutionalised. Despite dismantling of totalitarian structure, present political system still continues to prevail over the civil society (Patomaki and Pursianinen 1999: 65).

Parliament

The parliament of the Russian federation is a bicameral legislature-Federal Council (the upper house) and State Duma (the lower house). The State Duma is composed of 450 deputies, and Federation Council is composed of 178 deputies representing 89 republics and regions. The Russian Federation consists of about 120 nationalities and ethnic groups who have representation in parliament. This is a step forward towards establishing democratic culture. The function of law making and legislation is given to the Parliament by the Constitution but practically, the balance of power is clearly tilted in favour of the President as the power of veto even in financial legislation makes him more powerful (Chenoy 2001: 144). Constant power struggle between the legislature and the executive was the feature of Russian politics till the 1993 bombardment of Duma. This issue has been discussed in greater detail in chapter two and three.
Federalism

The collapse and disintegration of the Soviet State was followed by the declaration of the establishment of a new federation. The existence of fissiparous forces of the day was a major driving force behind the break-up of the centralised Soviet Union. Decentralization is essential for the consolidation of a successful democratic culture. The new Russia is named as the 'Russian Federation' that constitutes 89 units. Of these units 55 are provinces/regions, 2 cities, 21 republics (earlier known as the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics-ASSR) and 11 autonomous units (Article 65 (1)). The draft of 1993 constitution specified a ‘two level hierarchy’ within the federation, the “Russian Federation” and the “regions”. The constitution also guarantees the Republics “institution of own state language” and “preservation of native language” (Article 68).

The remarkable feature of the Russian federation is that the representatives of regions participated in drafting of the constitution. The upper house of the Parliament (Federal Council) consists of 178 members from 89 units. In fact, this house represents the federation as a whole. The role of the regions as influential actors has been demonstrated during the election and referendum. Thus, the future of Russian federalism lies with its units. Russian federalism has been discussed in great detail in preceding chapter.

Elections and Political participation

Elections: In December 1988, a new election law was passed by which the electorates were given a free hand to choose different candidates according to their will and wishes. This step was a cautious move on the part of the system to bring democracy closer to socialism. Today, the highest democratic body in Russia is the State Duma, composed of elected deputies. The new principle of election to the State Duma came into force in 1993 establishing dual system of representation. Half of the Duma’s 450 seats were elected by party list through a proportional representation system (in which votes are cast for parties, and seats are apportioned to the parties

---

8 More detail, discussion has been made in chapter II under section, “Constitutional Making a Points of Contention”.

147
based on the percentage of the vote attained), while the remaining half were elected through a single-member district plurality system (in which votes are cast for individual candidates in electoral districts, and the one with the greatest number of votes wins). According to Belin and Orttung (1997: 19), election rules were added specifically to get rid of insignificant parties and concentrate votes. To get on the party list ballot, a party had to gather the signatures of one hundred thousand supporters, with not more than 15 percent coming from any one of Russia's eighty-nine republics and regions. Parties also had to surmount a 5 percent barrier in the party list voting to gain seats (Federal law on elections).9

Since then, election law has been amended in 1995, 1999 and 2003. The election law adopted for the 2003 election retained the mixed member system (since then the mixed member system has been replaced by party list system, but that does not come within the timeframe of this study), but saw the creation of an uneven playing field for new and established parties. In June, 2001, the Duma approved a Kremlin-backed law designed to reduce the number of parties appearing on the ballot by establishing demanding organizational criteria for registration with the Ministry of Justice, including at least 10,000 members and branches with a minimum of 100 members each in at least 45 of the country's 89 regions, and no less than 50 members in each of the remaining branches (an amendment to the law in December 2004 increased these membership requirements five-fold, to 50,000 members, with branches of 500 members each in 45 regions and no less than 250 members in the remaining branches). Those parties which were able to meet these criteria were exempted from the requirement to collect 200,000 signatures or pay a deposit equal to 37.5 million roubles. The electoral deposit required of Single Member District candidates as an alternative to collecting signatures also rose to 900,000 roubles, more than ten times the amount in 1999.10


---


respectively within the period of this study. These elections have demonstrated that all major political parties have agreed to new minimal set of rules of political competition in which popular election were recognised as only legitimate means to political power. According to Michel McFaul (1996: 318-350), the era of polarised revolutionary politics began to wind down after the adoption of constitution and ended soon after 1996 presidential election. Or in other words, these two events have ensured Russia’s transition to electoral democracy.

In all these elections, the participants accepted the results although it was tinted with electoral violation. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in 2000 presidential election, Putin was elected the president through democratic electoral process. This election also marked the smooth changing of political power for the first time in hundreds of years of Russian history. These are some of the democratic achievements that are remarkable in development of democracy in Russia. Therefore, the electoral process has firmly got established and has come to stay in Russia.

Ironically, on the other hand, the election commission, which plays an important role in ensuring free and fair election in western democracies, has been modified little since the collapse of the Soviet system. Therefore, many political elites, politicians and regional leaders perceive election commission as an instrument of those in power (Gill 1998: 125-126). The president’s control over election commission coupled with his extraordinary judicial power ensures president’s continuation in office. Further, in the event of stepping down from the office, the incumbent president chooses a successor. Some political analysts have described this system as “elective monarchy”, where president rules like monarch but is subject to periodical election. President Putin emerged from this patronage system in which political succession is a prerogative of the incumbent President (Rutland 2000: 313-354). Therefore, many political actors still continue to yearn for unbiased autonomous election commission, which is yet to be established in Russia. This will instil confidence among the political participants and civil society at large.

As Russia emerged from its democratisation period and undertook competitive elections in 1993, optimism about the country’s chances of achieving democratic goals was boundless. Many analysts were of the opinion that election will replace authoritarian rule and would serve as the basis of stable democracy. However, today
there is an alarm among the political analyst that President Putin has revived an old Soviet Phase and describe his regime as “managed democracy” (Colton and McFaul 2003: 10-11). Now, it is impossible to ignore the growing use of coercion to win voter support and elections have become a false measure of democracy in Russia (Smyth 2006: 2).

Political Participation: Political participation in Russia is much higher than the western democracies. Though the voters turn out is debatable as a yardstick for measuring popular participation in democracies (Herd 1996: 200), since adoption of Constitution in 1993, there have been large participation in both the presidential and Duma elections (See table below). To some extent, it can imply that a vibrant democratic culture is developing in Russia. The popular inclination for participation is evident not only in the political sphere but also in socio-economic realms. Growth of the large non-profit sectors reflects a high level of public interest and involvement in the process of development and democracy through the means of collective action (Light 1996: 200).

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>64.32%</td>
<td>68.64%</td>
<td>1st round</td>
<td>69.67%</td>
<td>68.79%</td>
<td>64.37%</td>
<td>54.3%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duma</td>
<td>55.75%</td>
<td>61.85%</td>
<td></td>
<td>64.37%</td>
<td>54.3%*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Duma election was undertaken simultaneously with referendum on constitution

Source: Central Election Commission website

---

See Results of Previous Presidential Elections, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, [Online: web] Accessed 26 February 2007 URL: http://www.russiavotes.org/president/presidency_previous.php. For Elections to Duma, see Results of Previous Elections to the Russian State Duma, Centre for the Study of Public Policy,
Political parties

Political parties play a fundamental role in the representative political systems. They "connect civil and political society, advance the perceived interests of individuals, groups, and social strata while aiming consciously to develop these constituencies, and provide a link between society and the state, espousing the claims of the one and enforcing the rules of the other" (Sakwa 1995: 169). Moreover, political parties provide representation and accountability, electoral pressure for partisan constituencies, and the basis for structuring political choice in the competition of interests in the political arena. In short, they serve as an integral aspect of representative democracies, and thus are perceived as the bedrock for the process of democratization.

Russia experienced first competitive elections to the USSR's Congress of People's Deputies held in March 1989 which was instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev as part of his "reform from above" of the Soviet system prior to its collapse. In the 1989 elections no political parties, except for the Communist Party, were allowed to participate. The overriding issue of the 1989 campaign was reform, but it did little to stimulate the formation of a party system, since many of the reform candidates, along with the hard-liners, were still members of the Communist Party (Ponomarev 1993:15-21). Parties formed after the election tried to encash on the party's agenda on reforms in Russia, but they did not have sufficient time to organise prior to the 1990 elections for the Russian Republic's Congress of People's Deputies. As a result, the Russian parliament was not constituted along party lines (McFaul and Markov 1993: 21). In 1991, during the first Russian presidential election, despite the fact that Democratic Russia Party constituted Yeltsin's entire campaign organization, the movement was weakened by Yeltsin's "strategy of enhancing his personal authority to the neglect of institution building" (Urban and Gel'man 1997: 193).

The nascent party system that had begun to form was disrupted by the collapse of the Soviet system. Having functioned as an opposition force, political parties were simply not prepared to offer an action program once the system they opposed had disappeared. The democratic camp in particular lacked cohesion, being defined


151
largely by their opposition to the former Soviet system. It soon began to fracture 
(Dallin 1995: 248-59). Since neither Yeltsin nor the parliamentary members owed 
their positions to party connections, the role of parties in politics was marginalized. 
Politics became the province of technocratic elites applying democratic formulas from 
above (Sakwa 1995: 174).

The 1993 parliamentary elections for the newly created state Duma (the lower 
house of the new federal assembly) marked a change, not only because they put these 
parties to the test, but because they were held under new rules developed by Yeltsin to 
form a stable party system. Twenty six parties tried to be in the fray but only thirteen 
succeeded in obtaining the necessary 100000 signatures to be recognised as a party.

The results of the 1993 election was disappointment for those who hoped for 
the emergence of a stronger party system. The number of parties participating was 
kept lower than it might have been otherwise. Thirteen parties competed, out of which 
eight gained seats through the two voting methods, an additional four gained a few 
seats in the single-member district voting (a total of 8 out of 225), and one gained no 
seats. No party obtained a plurality out of total seats. Ideologically, the democratic 
"center" came out ahead, but the seats were divided among nine parties. The largest 
single block of 141 seats went to independent candidates who used the single-
member district voting to win without the benefit of party affiliation12.

Likewise, examination of the 1995 Duma election shows that many small 
parties continued to make their appearance (there were more than three hundred 
registered parties one year prior to the election) with forty-three parties vying in the 
fray. Of these only 19 parties qualified the stringent election qualification law 
excluding independents, only 17 could secure seats in the Duma in 1995. The 
communist being single largest party secured the highest number of seats of 157.13 
The election result of 1995 showed mix result of both strengthening party system and 
at the same time it showed that no political party has really developed into a stable 
organisation.

12 Analysed from the Results of Previous Elections to the Russian State Duma, Centre for the Study 
of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, [Online: web] Accessed 26 February 2007 URL: 
http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_elections_93-03.php

13 Ibid.
On the other hand 1999 Duma election offers a different picture with several noteworthy trends. First, the two parties created under president Putin initiative specifically to compete in the 1999 election, Unity party and the Union of Right Forces party secured many seats at the expense of most of the older parties. Second, a closer comparison of the proportional representation and single-member district contests shows that political parties played a significantly more substantial role in the former than in the latter, since no political party fared well in the single-member district races as they did in the proportional representation contests (Riggs and Schraeder 2005: 265-293). Only the Communist Party and the Fatherland-All Russia Party came close to attaining a balanced representation from both contests. This indicates that most of the political parties are less reliant on partisan constituencies than on the rules of proportional representation for their electoral successes.

The 2003 Duma election gave out different result from the previous elections. The United Russia party was formed by the merger of the Unity and Fatherland-All Russia parties and won 222 seats becoming single largest party overtaking Communist Party. The Communist Party though secured second position was reduced sizeably to less than half in its share of representation to just 52 seats from 113 since 1999 Duma election. The Liberal Democratic party secured 36 seats. The Motherland (People's Patriotic Union) party has brought together more than thirty political organizations under one umbrella and garnered 37 seats. Independents were reduced to 68 seats from 114 in 1999 Duma election. Yeltsin’s party, Our Home Is Russia disappeared.14 In short, the 2003 Duma election encouraged a less fragmented party system than had previously existed in Russia.

The 2000 presidential race, in which Putin won a first-round victory with 52 percent of the vote, held fewer surprises than the Duma elections, since Putin's victory seemed a foregone conclusion. According to Rose (2000: 1-7) in “2000 presidential election Putin had the same resources, media advantages, and regional support as the Unity Party, and he benefited considerably from the Unity Party’s victory”. The main difference in the 2003 and 2004 elections and other previous elections being that President Vladimir Putin became the prime mover in Russian politics. Putin has indisputably placed himself at the center of Russia's politics which Yeltsin never had

---

been able to do, by more closely engaging with one or the other political party, having endorsed both the Unity party and the Union of Right Forces party in the 1999 Duma elections, thus broadening his support base both for the 2003 Duma and 2004 Presidential Elections in Perspective (Riggs and Schraeder 2005, 141-152).

An examination of the results of the 2003 Duma election might suggest that a stable multiparty system is developing in Russia. Most of the parties have an established identity, whereas the new parties are the result of party consolidation. However, these patterns do not necessarily signal that Russian civil society is becoming more vibrant and politically engaged.

Media

During Soviet era, censorship and press were always most important means in controlling Soviet society. It ensured the predominance of the communist party and in particular its top leaders, be it Lenin or Gorbachev (Fawn and White 2002: 21). The ending of one party rule brought freedom and opportunity for the journalists and editors (Mcauley 1997: 208). With the democratisation and liberalisation process in Russia in the early 90’s, media too was opened.

Therefore, one of the greatest democratic achievements of Yeltsin presidency was ensuring an independent, critical and pluralistic press that emerged out from the complete state control. The first decade of post-communist Russia was a period of freedom of press, the main reason being, Yeltsin appeared to have valued the independent press. He was more tolerant to media criticising him and his government. Yeltsin government also passed some of the progressive legislation on freedom of press. More importantly, the threat of communist comeback was a threat to both Yeltsin and Press and forced them to be on the same side (McFaul 1997: 78). Market reforms initially also helped to stimulate still further growth of media outlets including TV.

Network Television (henceforth NTV), the first private television network started by Vladimir Gusinsky in 1993, provided a source of information that was truly independent of government control. Defying government threats to its license, NTV earned its credentials as a serious news organisation when it provided critical coverage of the First Chechen War. Media-MOST with NTV, daily newspaper
Segodnya and radio station Ekho Moskvy and weekly magazine Itogi, became a media power house in post Soviet Russia (Lipman and McFaul 2004: 58). Other financial tycoons followed suit believing that the media, especially television as an important political tool. Boris Berezovsky acquired stake in ORT television Russia’s largest television network. Russia’s small group of financial houses, and oil and natural gas companies also gobbled up most of the Moscow based daily newspapers.

This does not mean that the government no longer had a controlling stake in media. The government had a stake in two of the largest national television channels, Obshchestvennoe Rossiyskoye Televidenie (henceforth ORT) and Russian Television and Radio (henceforth RTR). But a truly independent media came into existence having independent source of information, which was not afraid to criticise Yeltsin and his government. The oligarchs mostly owned these private media companies. In fact during Yeltsin’s period, Russia did not lack a free press because of government’s censorship and control but because of oligarch’s control of the meaningful media outlets- that only sought to serve their interests (Gidadhubli and Sampatkumar 2000: 28-29).

Putin, unlike Yeltsin on becoming president in March 2000 immediately moved to weaken those media outlets independent and critical of the state. His assault on media began with the commercial network NTV which supported Fatherland-All Russia or OVR (henceforth OVR) party in the 1999 Duma campaign and Yavlinskii in 2000 presidential campaign. Further, to the dislike of Putin it provided the most candid coverage of the two Chechen wars and put forth sever criticism of Putin over the sinking of Kursk submarine in August 2000.

Putin first move was in early 2000 when he ordered his administration to investigate alleged past misdeeds of Vladimir Gusinskii President of Media-Most Company which owned NTV. In May 2000, its offices were raided and in June, Gusinsky was arrested for fraud involving millions of dollars. He was later released after he agreed to cede his control over ‘NTV’ (Pandey 2002: 115-116). Within few months, Gazprom’s largest creditor of Media-MOST media holding company which had strong ties with Kremlin took over the control of NTV on account of financial mismanagement and Gusinskii fled the country. Further, employees of news magazine Itogi were fired and most of the Media-Most ancillaries were shut down. The assault
on the NTV continued and in January 2003, Boris Jordan the Russian-American
director of NTV was dismissed due to NTV’s 2002 critical coverage of the
government’s handling of the hostage crisis in a theatre at Moscow (Feifer 2003).
Many of NTV’s best journalist and producers migrated to TV-6, a much smaller
station owned by Berezovskii only to have government close it down.

President Putin on 12 September 2000 endorsed the Doctrine on Information
Security drafted by Security Council. According to Putin, the doctrine will “oblige
the state to explain to its citizens the essence of decisions being taken”. He further
said that doctrine seeks to ensure, “observing of the constitutional rights and freedoms
of the individual and citizen to receive and use information, ensuring Russia’s
spiritual revival and preserving and strengthening social moral values, the tradition of
patriotism and humanism and cultural and scientific potential of the country”.

However, the doctrine in reality was aimed at strengthening the state owned
mass media and combat dissemination of misinformation about government policies
and institutions and limit unsanctioned access to information (Pandey 2002: 115-116).
The information security doctrine was severely criticised by Russian Union of
Journalists. Igor Yakovenko Union’s general secretary said that, “this document is in
and of itself a real and present danger to the country’s information security, in that it
is written in a spirit very much at odds with the principles of freedom of expression.”
Likewise, many other public figures also criticised the doctrine as a
threat to the freedom of speech in Russia. These threats to the press and civil society
cannot be considered in any way positive for democratic consolidation in Russia.

Since then the governmental agencies severely restricted access to Chechnya
by Russian and foreign correspondents, and have arrested and intimidated several
journalists whose war stories have been found inconvenient by Putin’s administration
(McFaul and Tatic 2005: 475). The struggle about the media involves business and

---

17 Ibid.
personality issues as well as questions of free speech. In Russia, nation wide television broadcasting is today closer to state monopoly. A free Media is one of the leading indicators of a free society. The nature of Putin's policies has severely undermined one of Russia's most important democratic achievements of the last decade - a critical and independent press that acted, in some small ways, as a check on state power. Although Russia's media tycoons may not have been ardent advocates of free and independent press rather than profit seeking, yet their outlets offered an alternative view, different from that of the state.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

On the eve of soviet disintegration, the question of responsibility for social needs was contested by the associations of the new non-governmental sphere, such as women's groups, consumer rights groups and other associations. These groups were first permitted during the perestroika period of the late 1980s as General Secretary Gorbachev tried to democratize Soviet society from above. The term civil society entered Russian political discourse during this period, as Russian leadership consciously sought to change the nature of relations between individual and state by creating an active citizenry that would take on more responsibility in society (Pilkington 1992: 105-129).

During the Soviet period, education, healthcare, and child-care were provided by the paternalist socialist state. While these services were under-resourced and unsatisfactory, they were a crucial part of the social contract (Cook 1993: 183). The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the collapse of the socialist state led to the steady erosion of social guarantees in Russia. Radical economic and social reforms undertaken by Russia's first democratic governments during the 1990s compounded this erosion and failed to install new structures. The emergence of the independent community groups and the influx of international capital to these groups in the form of grants and funding, NGOs in Russia have taken the role of restructuring of the social services following the collapse of state socialism.

Societal groups mushroomed in the early 1990s in response to the collapse of the Soviet system of social security. Since then, western donor agencies such as the Charities Aid Foundation, Eurasia, the Ford Foundation, and MacArthur (Hemment
2004: 215-241) have been contributing to the project to forge citizen activism and responsible engagement. They have specifically sought independent community groups to work with, as part of their commitment to civil society development. The promotion of the NGOs in Russia has to do with the popularity of the concept of civil society, which has been a crucial ideological signifier of democratization.

The important organizational resources of NGOs appear to offer a means for fostering autonomous, participatory and articulate movements in civil society. There are around 600,000 organisations, active in Russia in the NGO sector. These are involved in diverse spheres of public life. Given the lack of domestic support and domestic resources, the Russian NGOs depend upon foreign support in terms of finance and human resources. This jeopardises the development of Russian non-profit sector and the healthy development of a democratically oriented civil society.

The influence of Western aid on the development of civic community in Russia cannot be averted. They have both positive and negative consequences in their influence. According to Henderson (2002: 141) the Western aid has positively influenced to develop the base for civil society and democracy in the long run as they are ‘exporting democracy’, on the other hand it also has a crucial significance, since collaboration with donor agencies means taking on the models and concepts they promote.

Hence, the Russian NGOs, rather than setting agendas for their own interests, are often responding to agendas set by the West. In fact, an international civil society is developing, not in conjunction with, but, perhaps at the expense of democratic civic development in home countries. Henderson explains (2002: 149), “The West’s attempt to foster civil society, a grassroots, bottom-up sector, from the top-down is an interesting attempt to solve the collective action dilemma. Consequently, funders are not free agents, rather, they are the expressions and facilitators of US interest as well as the monetary engine behind Russian civic organisations”.

---

20 This estimate has been given by Russia Profile Organisation, [Online: web] accessed on 17 June 2006 URL: http://www.russiaprofile.org/resources/ngos
The suspicion and discomfort with the western assistance to Russian NGOs and the work of western NGOs within Russia was effectively dealt by Putin administration by first using anti western propaganda. Next, it accused western double standard and western behaviour against Russia and third it harassed Russian NGOs and movements that receive western assistance and pursued liberal democratic agenda (Shevtsova and Shevtsova 2007: 305).

Further, Russian NGOs receiving foreign fund and foreign NGOs became inevitable victims when in January 2006 president Putin signed a bill into law imposing tough control on local and foreign NGOs functioning in the country.23 Although described by the President as aiming to bring order rather than restrictions into the activities of NGOs. The NGO registration law, which came into effect in April 2006, requires NGOs to file lengthy annual reports and have been criticised as an excuse to clamp down on Russia’s nascent civil society. Amnesty International believes that the law instead undermines NGOs work by giving the authorities increased powers of scrutiny of the funding and activities of Russian and foreign NGOs. The experience to date has been that the law is unduly burdensome, diverting resources from substantive programmes, while using a regulatory framework that can be arbitrarily applied, has key provisions which lack a precise legal definition, and sanctions that are disproportionate. Major efforts have been directed against western organisations and those Russian organisation receiving foreign funds. 24

Trade Unions

During soviet period, despite the rhetoric of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and de facto mandatory trade union membership (which made unions the largest organisations in the country), organised labour did not exercise a leading role in communist society. This was reserved exclusively for the vanguard of the working class, the Communist Party, and labour organisations, like all other groups in society, were subjugated to the party.

Chapter-V

Under Gorbachev there was an effort to reform industrial relations and the role of workers (Collier and Collier 1991: 12). In the 1987 law on state enterprises empowered workers' councils (first created in 1983) to elect managers and were given a role in the governance of the enterprise. At the same time Gorbachev attempted to increase the autonomy of enterprise directors by decentralising and introducing self-financing. The results of Gorbachev's perestroika resulted in confusion. Despite his arguably good intentions, Gorbachev's reforms did not lead to worker empowerment and in 1990 new laws stripped workers' councils of many of their rights.

Nevertheless, there was some autonomous mobilisation of workers from below. In July 1989 a wave of strikes among coal miners in Russia offered a stiff challenge to Gorbachev and the Soviet trade unions. This strike was the result of the failures of both the macro and enterprise level reforms to live up to the aspirations of the workers. It also was a repudiation of the trade unions, which were rejected by the workers as tools of management (Clarke et al. 1993: 94-95). These strikes, demanded political and economic reform. Some concessions were given to the miners, but the lasting legacy of this wave of strikes was the formation of an Independent Miners' Union (NPG) in 1990. Once again, NPG lead strikes in 1991 in support of privatisation and for Yeltsin in his battle with Gorbachev. While NPG emerged as more prominent union, many smaller trade unions emerged. The result was these associations posed a major challenge to both the Soviet trade unions and the party that stood behind them.

With the collapses of Soviet Union the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), the successor body to the All Union Central Committee of Trade Unions (VTsSPS) became dominant trade union while others new small trade unions became more insignificant. Despite its membership fell from a self-declared 66 million in 1991 to 38 million 10 years later, its unions (43 branch and 89 territorial bodies) represented 95% of the unionised workers in Russia. It held onto property (sanatoria, health clinics, sports facilities, childrens' camps, apartments, offices) held by the VTsSPS which was valued at some 5.3 billion roubles (Ashwin and Clark 2002: 90) This property FNPR's has been crucial to keeping and attracting members, and it has been a major topic of dispute between the FNPR.
While the FNPR has been successful in keeping the bulk of its resources, it has arguably been less successful in re-shaping itself into a genuine representative of the workers. The FNPR has also been unable to mobilise the bulk of its members to protest at economic conditions and policies that have been catastrophic to millions of workers. Much of the FNPR's activity—in protests, lobbying and political campaigning has been in concert with managers of enterprises and employers' organisations, and this can cast doubt on how far the unions have succeeded in becoming a voice of workers (Cook: 1997: 76).

Empowered by these 'victories', the FNPR pushed further, openly declaring its support for the Supreme Soviet in the latter's stand-off with Yeltsin. When Yeltsin prevailed over the parliament after October bombing, FNPR was left extremely vulnerable. However, Yeltsin instead of banning the FNPR entirely, forced a leadership change of the FNPR and took the right of legislative initiative and control of social funds away from unions (Ashwin and Clark 2002: 90). The unions, as well as other groups in Russian society, were clearly on the defensive as Yeltsin began to concentrate power in his hands.

A Treaty on Social Accord was duly signed in 29 April 1994 which guaranteed that there will be no political violence before the next presidential elections, scheduled in 1996. That would give the Government two years of calm to focus on economic recovery (Specter 1994). Since then the FNPR has tried to avoid playing an explicitly political role. The FNPR has not been entirely silent, but its protests are restricted to purely economic demands. Though, the FNPR has not been leading the most radical protests or demanding the resignation of the government, as miners did in 1998 when they bypassed all the unions and blockaded railways to draw attention to the fact that some workers had not been paid for over nine months. The FNPR, fearing government action against it (e.g. nationalisation of its property) has eschewed radicalism (violent protests and ban), but it has been forging electoral alignments with the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in 1993 and 1995 Duma elections and with Fatherland-All Russia (OVR) in 1999 Duma elections joined the United Russia party, a party whose only programme is to support for President Putin (Mandel 2003: 132-152).
While some of these problems can be directly attributed to the FNPR's heritage and slack labour markets that inhibit worker mobilisation, difficulties also arise from the FNPR's troubled and often ambiguous relationship with the political authorities. In 1991 the FNPR declared its political independence, breaking from the Communist Party, but it quickly emerged as a critic of the Yeltsin government. It lobbied together with enterprise directors for credits to industry, wage increases and provisions for 'insider privatisation' through buy-outs by managers and workers.

Thus in Russia what has emerged is a strange and distorted 'social partnership', supported by Tripartite Commissions for Regulation of Social and Labour Relations established in 1992, which comprises of representatives of government, labour, and management, who have come together to negotiate and institutionalise structures for bargaining between the three. While the unions can claim some victories, i.e. a fairly liberal law on trade unions, many are rather hollow. General and collective agreements have been routinely abrogated. Tripartite bodies have an insufficient legal basis, and they have become 'only a device for letting off steam' (Conner 1996: 57).

The problems are many, but boil down to a couple of crucial points: 'partnership' is impossible given the inequality in power between the state and the unions, and the ability of workers to press their claims is severely hampered by fears of unemployment or loss of work-based benefits.

In 2000 when an attempt was made to adopt a new Labour Code in Russia, all the unions protested and the National Tripartite Commission refused to approve it, but the government went ahead and introduced its measure into parliament, where the unions managed in autumn 2000 to convince parliamentarians to block it. However, in 2001 the FNPR and the government agreed on a compromise version that passed a first reading in the Duma in July which was signed by the president Putin as law on 30 December\(^\text{25}\). While the bill did granted workers protections in a variety of areas (on issues such as vacations, overtime, mandatory collective agreements, although opponents argue that these protections are rather weak), it has generated controversy because some of its provisions could be harmful, even fatal, to the newer, smaller unions.

Chapter-V

According to the Labour Code the employers would be obligated to negotiate only with the union representing the majority of workers (almost always an FNPR union), employers could also negotiate with 'other representatives of workers' (which could create an opening for employers to create their own 'pocket' unions), and the question of strikes would be determined by the entire work collective, not trade unions. This draft has bitterly divided the union movement, and ironically put communists and the erstwhile reformist, new unions on the same side. Many construe it as an assault by the government on freedom of association.

Since privatisation was carried out preceded restructuring, workers in the privatised Russia have suffered from low wages, wage delays, dismissals and periods of forced administrative leave. Union leaders have lamented the results of privatisation. The other effects of privatisation have been the decline in union membership. Overall, trade union membership has dropped by almost half, and has fallen more rapidly since large scale privatisation was launched in 1993-94. In addition to workers who have retired or lost their jobs, there has certainly been significant movement to new enterprises and jobs in the private sector, as traditional 'working class' jobs have far less attraction than in the past. These new jobs, including those in banking, marketing, retail, petty trade and sweatshops-are almost entirely non-unionised, and many of them are in small enterprises employing fewer than 50 workers. However, by 1998 according to Sarah Ashwin and Simon Clark (2002: 87) membership of trade unions has stabilised.

However, in large industrial enterprises unionisation rates remained high, up to 80-90%, although resistance to change could be reason rather than enthusiasm or confidence in the union (Kubicke 2002: 612). Despite privatisation, many unions have continued to function without much significant change in the functions or actions as they were in Soviet times. Much union activity is done in conjunction with management, and in many sectors there has been less union-management hostility, even though conditions for workers have deteriorated. More significantly, like Soviet times there is joint activity between the two in lobbying efforts towards the state to extract credits and subsidies for particular branches or enterprises.

Despite privatisation in many sectors, state protection from foreign competition or state investment is still desperately needed, and thus unions and management lobby together. In many ways it makes sense, as the state must play a supportive role if many sectors are to survive and profitability means wages and jobs. Unions need not be adversarial toward management all the time. However, often joint action with the directors ends up with the factual loss of independence, as unions lose sight of workers' interests and become a tool of management. This not only reinforces points about the lack of internal reform but demonstrates that privatisation has not fundamentally changed labour relations in Russia. After privatisation, over 80% of Russian workers work in the private sphere, and while privatisation would no doubt present some new obstacles for unions, one might at minimum suspect that it would break of state-director-union that had constrained autonomous union activity in the past, and that post-Soviet unions would begin to behave more like Western trade unions (Kubicek 2002: 611).

(IV)

DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY DURING YELTSIN AND PUTIN PRESIDENCIES

Yeltsin Presidency

Civil society in the Yeltsin era, according to Weigle (2002: 117-146), was characterised by "demobilization" of Russian independent activism followed in the wake of demise of Soviet system, a process common to all emerging civil societies in the former Soviet bloc. First, the dissolution of the Soviet party-state led to the explosion of informal groups, as individuals and groups faced a changing array of problems and reoriented their activities in the context of a new state structure and the reorganization of politics, the economy, and society. The decline in independent activism was precipitated not only by changes in the social structure but also by efforts of political elites to discourage activism in the initial phases of postcommunist state construction.
Second, the introduction of economic reforms and their distortion at the hands of the nomenklatura capitalists and emerging oligarchs not only impoverished a significant portion of the country and inhibited the development of a middle class, but it also began to reconfigure the structure of social interests that gives birth to activism. As Michael Bernhard notes in his comparative study of civil society demobilization: "Economic recession demobilizes support for reform and mobilizes groups behind political leaderships that oppose it. This reorientation of the axes of political conflict has the short term effect of weakening the existing organizational basis of civil society, while providing new issues that will help realign it" (Bernhard 1996: 322). The highly charged political atmosphere of the Gorbachev era gave way to the economic malaise of the Yeltsin years, and that was reflected in independent group activism in postcommunist Russia.

Third, till 1997 there were few legal parameters within which independent groups could operate. The October 1990 Law on Associations continued to be the legal foundation for group registration with justice authorities in the initial postcommunist period, but the structures and processes that had regulated group activity were no longer in place. There were no laws defining the legal status of a variety of groups, regulating their activity, or articulating their relations with administrative or legislative organs of power at a time when institutions in all of those levels were in the very process of formation. With no clear institutionalisation of power, it was impossible for struggling independent groups to have any impact on policymaking (Weigle 2002:117-146). In the absence of support structures, such as a court system to guarantee their legal rights, attentive media to advertise their activities, or an economic system that could support their efforts, independent groups barely manage to survive the transition.

A fourth reason for the demobilization of civil society was the brain drain. Not surprisingly, given the poor conditions for civil society development, some of the most energetic, talented, and ambitious activists of the informal movement period of 1987-89 began to redirect their energies first to parliamentary and party politics in Soviet Russia in 1989 and 1990 and then to the executive branch when the momentum switched from party formation to state construction in post-Soviet Russia in 1991 (Smith 1996: 192-93). That process continued into the 1990s, as talented activists
threw their efforts into the emerging private economic sector or regional politics (Dawson 1996: 167).

Despite the pressures toward demobilization, independent group activism continued, developing strategies to influence policymakers even in the tumultuous conditions of the early transition period. One of the reasons was an initial flood of Western and international aid foundations dedicated to the establishment of a civil society in postcommunist Russia encouraged the creation of independent groups (Ruffin et al. 1999: 26).

Another problem during Yeltsin era was the weakness of the legal system and the inconsistency of laws at the federal, regional, and local levels. Laws themselves are no guarantee of positive outcomes. Russian third-sector activists are quick to note that laws supporting civil society development are not always honored by local or regional officials. Laws often have no force when authorities are intent on pursuing their own interests, especially in local and regional prosecutors' offices. Federal laws are often not supported by local legislation, further hampering third-sector activity. This, in large part, results from inconsistent legislation and behavior of officials throughout Russia, the absence of "budgetary federalism," and the related lack of transparency in budgetary transfers from the federal level to the localities.

Contributing to these problems is the absence of structural support for civil society development in Russia. The absence of strong federalism, an effective state, a developed middle class, a free enterprise system, and independent news media that uphold ethical standards are all cited by activists as contributing to the weakness of civil society development. On the theme of local self-government, for example, the Yeltsin strategy of concluding "treaties"27 between the federal government and subjects of the federation (republics and regions) on everything from tax breaks to regional and local control over resources created ill-defined and inconsistent federal-regional-local political relationships. Russian activists point out that this strategy only contributes to separatist tendencies in Russia.

Yeltsin’s presidency gave rise to a hybrid system that regulated relations between the regime and society on the basis of conflict and irreconcilable principles. State authorities are elected, but candidates to elective office are appointed from

---

27 These treaties are known as federation treaties and have been discussed in the chapter IV.
above, and elections are manipulated. The rule of law is enshrined in the constitution, but surreptitious deals are the order of the day. Although society has a federal structure, the centre dictates policy to the regions. Free market exists, but officials constantly meddle in the economy. It is generally said that in the Soviet period and even before that Russia had a 'strong state' and a 'weak society', where as the post-Soviet Russia has exemplified a 'Weak state' and a 'weak society' (Brown 2001: 46). Boris Yeltsin, the first president of the Russian Federation and former Communist party functionary, emerged as genuinely anti-Communist. This is not to say that he became a democrat in the western sense. The fact is that he came to think of himself as a democrat, notwithstanding his weak grasp of the procedural and institutional dimensions of democracy. Boris Yeltsin’s leadership can be best described as a ‘weak president’ guided by ‘powerful interests’ or what has been called as ‘oligarchical corporatism’ (Brown 2001: 47). Both lobbyist and corporatist relations in Russia are based on significant measures upon predominance of narrow group interests. The state does not check these group interests or guide them into a civilised channel, but on the contrary, provides incentives to group rule (Gruppovschina), which emerged as a breeding-ground for corruption and criminality.

Putin’s Russia: Democratic Rollback an Impediment to Development of Civil Society

When George Bush jr. and Putin first met in Slovenia in June 2001, Bush was not alone in downplaying Putin’s antidemocratic acts at home. At the time, many observers of Russian affairs inside and outside of the Bush administration believed that Putin’s positive achievements outweighed his negative steps. Putin was presiding over Russia’s most substantial economic growth since independence while also pursuing several economic reforms such as new tax and land code that had languished for years under President Yeltsin. In foreign affairs, Putin was striking a pragmatic pose, cooperating with almost everyone on something. At home, Putin’s battles with Chechens and oligarchs (some of whom controlled major media holdings) were justified as necessary steps toward righting the wrongs of the chaotic Yeltsin years.

Conventional wisdom on Russia posited that Putin was too weak and too constrained to change qualitatively the nature of political regime. Business interests, governors, and Yeltsin holdovers still working in Kremlin would keep the inexperienced Putin in check. In addition, many argued that Putin could not undermine democracy in Russia because by 1999 there was nothing left to undermine. Nearly ten years of Yeltsin’s rule had destroyed the achievements of Russia’s democratic breakthrough following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For others, hundreds of years of autocratic culture were most enduring, and a “strongman” like Putin therefore represented continuity, not a disruption, with Russia’s past.

Five years later, while some cling to the idea that nothing is new in the way Russia is ruled, most observers are impressed by how much the regime has changed. Russia remains corrupt and inefficient, and Putin himself is in many ways an indecisive or ineffective leader. The regime he heads today is more stable but far less pluralistic and more centralized than the one he inherited in 2000.

First of all, there is Putin’s indifference to human rights was displayed when Chechen rebels invaded neighboring Dagestan in 1999 to liberate Muslim people of the Caucasus. Vladimir Putin’s (then Prime Minister), response was not limited to expelling the terrorist attackers in Dagestan. Rather, Putin used the crisis as a pretext in trying to tame Chechnya through the use of force. According to Chechnya Peace Forum, more than 100,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in Chechnya. Despite his excessive use of force terrorist attacks against Russians have continued, including the horrific attack on the schoolhouse in Beslan in September 2004 and Moscow theater siege.

Putin’s indifference to human rights in Chechnya has resulted in both Russian military forces and their enemies in Chechnya blatantly abusing the human rights of Russian citizens in the region. This argument can be substantiated by the fact that, in the first international ruling addressing abuses by the Russian government during the conflict in Chechnya, the European Court of Human Rights found Russia guilty of serious human rights violations in Chechnya. The Court ruled in three cases on behalf of Chechens whose family members had been killed in aerial bombings and tortured by Russian forces. It found that Russia had used disproportionate force in its military

---

operations, indiscriminately targeted civilians, and failed to adequately investigate civilian deaths.\textsuperscript{30}

Second, Putin and his government initiated a series of successful campaigns against independent media outlets. The independence of electronic media has eroded. More generally, Putin created negative atmosphere for journalistic work. His most vocal media critics have lost their jobs, have been harassed by tax authorities or by sham lawsuits, or have been arrested. To keep their jobs, others now practice self-censorship. Mysteriously, several journalists have been harassed and killed during Putin's Presidency. The third annual worldwide press-freedom index in 2004 placed Russia 140 out of 167 countries assessed.\textsuperscript{31}

A third important political change carried out by Putin was "regional reforms." Almost immediately after becoming president in 2000, Putin made reining in Russia's regional executives his top priority. He began his campaign to reassert Moscow's authority by establishing seven supra-regional districts headed primarily by former generals and KGB officers.\textsuperscript{32} Putin also emasculated the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia's parliament, by removing governors and heads of regional legislatures from this chamber and replacing them with appointed representatives from the regional executive and legislative branches of government. In September 2004, in a final blow to Russian federalism, Putin announced his plan to appoint governors (Baker 2004). He justified the move as a means of making regional authorities more accountable and more effective, yet the overwhelming majority of the nearly 40 newly appointed governors have been the old governors in place before.

Fourth, in December 2003, Putin made real progress in weakening the autonomy of one more institution of Russia's democratic system, the parliament. After the 1999 parliamentary election, Putin enjoyed a majority of support within the Duma. To make the Duma more compliant, he and his administration took advantage of earlier successes in acquiring control of other political resources (such as NTV and the backing of governors) to achieve a smashing electoral victory for the Kremlin's

party, United Russia in the December 2003 parliamentary election. United Russia and its allies in the parliament now control two-thirds of the seats in parliament.\footnote{For Elections to Duma, see Results of Previous Elections to the Russian State Duma, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, [Online: web] Accessed 26 February 2007 URL: http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_elections_93-03.php}

Fifth, Putin and his regime demonstrated a blatant disregard for property rights and the institutions that protect them when they renationalized and then redistributed the most important assets of Yukos, formerly Russia’s largest oil company. Russian authorities first arrested Yukos Chief Executive Officer Mikhail Khodorkovsky, then saddled the company with billions of dollars in taxes, and sold its most profitable asset, Yuganskneftegaz, to a state-owned company, Rosneft-whose chairman of the board, Igor Sechin is also a chief aide to Putin. Andrei Illarionov, Putin’s own economic advisor, called the sale of Yuganskneftegaz the “scam of the year” (Ostrovsky 2004).

Finally, Putin has even decided that non-governmental organizations (NGOS) are a threat to his power. By enforcing draconian registration procedures and tax laws, Putin’s administration has forced many NGOS critical of the Kremlin to close down. To marginalise independent NGOS, the Kremlin has devoted massive resources to the creation of state-sponsored and state-controlled NGOS. In his 2004 annual address to the Federation Assembly, Putin argued that “not all of the organizations are oriented towards standing up for people’s real interests. For some of them, the priority is to receive financing from influential foreign foundations.”\footnote{Putin, Vladimir (2004) “Address to the Federal Assembly of the Federation”, [Online: web] Accessed 23 September 2006 URL: http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/sdocs/speeches.shtml?month=05&day=26&year=2004&prefix=&value_from=&value_to=&date=&stype=82912&dayRequired=no&day enable=true&Submit.x=3&S ubmit.y=5.} Subsequently, pro-Kremlin members of parliament have introduced legislation that would tighten state control over the distribution of grants from foreign donors.

Putin’s weakening of independent institutions and autonomous political groups have created a political system which, in the wrong hands, could easily morph into a full- fledged repressive autocratic regime. Leaders of such a regime would rely even more heavily on corruption and unlawful ways to stay in power. Putin was not a dictator and Russia today is not a full-blown dictatorship in the hands of a militant
nationalist, but rather a competitive autocratic regime headed by a ruthless but pragmatic state builder.

Vladimir Putin, the chosen successor of Boris Yeltsin was personally committed to reaffirm state power vis-à-vis the oligarchs, the mass media, the republics and the regions. Under Putin, there was a shift in the balance of power from the oligarchs to the state: statist rather than oligarchical. Putin was against an official 'state ideology' (Putin 2002: 13). Addressing the first session of the State Council on 22nd November 2000, Putin said ‘a very important of our common work is to strengthen the vertical structure of power’ (Brown 2001: 50). A strong state is needed, but it should be democratic, which will make a difference from the earlier totalitarian state. According to Putin, “Modern Russian society does not identify a strong and effective state with a totalitarian state. We have come to value the benefits of democracy, a law-based state with personal and political freedom. A key to Russia’s recovery and growth lies in the state policy sphere. So it needs a strong state power, and must have it. I am not calling for totalitarianism. The direction for its formation is creating conditions beneficial for the rise in the country of a full-fledged ‘civil society’ to balance out and monitor the authorities” (Putin 2002: 5-29).

(V)

OBSTACLES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The biggest obstacle to the development of the civil society in Russia is the nature of the Russian state. There are various other obstacles.

Organised crime and corruption are widespread in Russian society. Shlapentokh (1997) argues that the existing Russian government does not work efficiently due to corruption and crime. Moreover, the population has now lost its trust in any of the institutions of power, as they are dominated by the mafia and criminals. Criminalised and corrupt state is the greatest obstacle to the development of civil society since it undermines popular faith in the system.
Social and political polarisation of the society is widening and the stratification based on wealth is increasing. This aggravates social inequalities. The wage gap between 10 percent most poorly paid and 10 percent highly paid was already 26 times in 1995 (Golenkova, 1999: 13). This gap between the poor and rich is widening day by day. This is fraught with social and political turmoil.

Traditional Russian political culture (marked by an absence of institutions for communicating popular demands and a highly centralised and unlimited authority) is continuing in new Russian political landscape (White 2000: 122). Hence, the lack of democratic experience in the past now remains an obstacle in development of a democratic system.

According to Sakwa (1996: 358-360), Russian modernisation is not identical to the Westernisation. He says that the problem in Russia is not ‘underdevelopment’ but ‘mis-development’ both in economic and political spheres. Modernization includes the destruction of the traditional system but this did not take place in Russia.

The media cannot play its expected role as the fourth estate, because of lack of freedom to do so. Due to economic difficulties, newspapers have to get financial support from the state or the elite structure. Forcing them to adopt partiality towards some groups and give up their objectivity.

The political institutions created under the 1993 Constitution without proper checks and balances strengthened the presidency. Although, this could tackle the country’s many economic and social problems as well as guard its great power status in international affairs, such “super-presidentialism has hampered the growth of not only a healthy and vibrant party system but also a civil society” (Pandey 2002: 112).
On the question of choice between liberal democracy and centrally controlled government, Russians looked favorably on China's combination of strong central government controls with rapid economic growth. When asked to choose between China and America model of government, many Russian believed that china's model has more to offer Russia. While 44% preferred centrally controlled government like China, less than a 30% preferred liberal democracy as in the United States, and 26% responded was not sure, which model of governance will best suit Russia.\(^{35}\)

As found out in the above opinion, although Russians supported policies that were concentrating political power in the Kremlin, at least as temporary measures, they still tend to believe their country is on a democratic course. Half of the Russian public (52%) feels that Russia in on the democratic course, out of which 15% strongly felt so and 37% felt somewhat. On the other hand 34% of Russian did not agree that Russia in on the democratic course, out of which 23% strongly felt so while 11% felt somewhat, while 14 percent felt that they can’t say\(^\text{36}\).

On the Russian citizens’ participation in protest rallies which was surveyed for 6 times over the period of 5 months in 2005, it was found out that, those who did not participate in the protest rallies remained constantly above 95%, while participation in the protest rallies meagerly remained below 5% throughout the period of survey. Less than 2% respondent throughout the period of survey said, it’s too hard to answer.\textsuperscript{37} Though participation in protest and rally cannot be considered as democratic in strict sense, non participation in large percentage indicates Russians ignorance or indifference to their individual and democratic rights.

On the question of the meaning of ‘Russian presidency’, 62% percent of the respondent said that Russian president means “head of the country” to them, while 5% attribute it to “moral qualities”, 7% opted for “care for well being of people and the country”, while 3% choose as “guarantor of rights and freedoms”, 3% chose to say that president of Russian to them is associated with “negative appraisals”. While 3% opted for “provides order and stability, 18% either did not respond or gave wrong answer.  

---

Majority of Russians express support for measures that international and domestic critics cite as evidence that President Putin is rolling back democratic reforms. Since Putin’s election in 2000, the Kremlin has brought national television broadcasters under state control while state-owned or state-controlled companies have bought up some of the country’s most influential newspapers and magazines. A majority (56%) of Russians, however, supported increased government control of the media, out of which (37%) supported a strong control and (19%) supported it for temporary measure (19%). Twenty-one percent oppose such control and 21 percent say they are neutral or don’t know.39

President Putin’s government has also come under criticism especially from the west for passing legislation that tightens regulations governing the activities of internationally-funded Non Governmental Organisation groups. But Russians themselves lean toward support for these measures. Nearly half (43%) of the Russian’s supported restrictions imposed on international NGO’s promoting human rights, saying they either support them outright (28%) or as a temporary measure (15%). Thirty-two percent of Russians oppose such limits. While 25% percent say they are neutral or don’t know. 

---

Table 5.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support temporarily</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Table 5.9

No Direct election of Regional Governors

More than a third (37%) of Russians also supports Putin’s decision in December 2004 to end the direct election of governors, out which 26% outrightly supported and 11% supported it as a temporary measure. Only 18 % of Russians oppose this change, while 44% said they are neutral or don’t know.

The west and many people in Russia have always been skeptical about Russian democracy. However, on many issues the Russian citizens thinks otherwise. Contrary to the popular belief, majority of Russian citizens feel that Russia is marching towards achieving democratic goals. However given choice, Russian preferred centralised control of governance over liberal democracy, one of the reasons maybe attributed to corruption and crime. Putin’s action against media, NGO and putting and end of regional governor election, similarly, was not either completely out of public favour rather his action mustered quite a sizeable numbers of support. While Russian public participation in protest and rallies (over a period of 5 months) found out that more than 95% Russian of did not participate. Unlike popular belief, majority (63%) of Russian sees president as ‘the head of the state’ (positive appraisal) and only 3% sees Russian president in the light of negative appraisal.

Conclusion

The possibility of development of a civil society depends upon the capacity of the people for self-organisation, which Robert Putnam termed as social capital (Putnam and Coleman 1993: 169). So far as this social capital is concerned, Russian situation is marked by a quite high level of dynamism and diversity of associative forms (Levin 1997: 77-80). The civic enthusiasm that burst forth and spilled onto the streets of major Russian cities during perestroika turned out to be mostly fleeting. During the 90s, Russians seemed to withdraw from politics to concentrate on economic survival. Cooperative efforts at managing social problems continued to exist, including activities such as the spring beautification day and Citizen Street Patrols for high crime areas in various cities.

It has been said that history predisposes Russians’ attitudes toward mutual distrust and toward stoic acceptance of what the government does rather than confidence in the government (Colton 1995: 748-49). Russian’s attitude towards civic life may themselves be an obstacle that must be overcome for democracy to take root. Political interests still exist, however perhaps now more so than ever before, citizens have a stake in what the government does.

All these developments have been depicted with a vision of reducing and circumscribing the state power, and liberating spontaneous self-generating societal evolution. This also gets strengthened by the presence of certain principles: democracy, political pluralism, free market and private property, rule of law and constitutionalism. In practice, the approach of reformism never realized the goal of state’s voluntary withdrawal from power and its invitation of the society for a viable partnership. At least, the existing formal democratic structure in Russia provides a good scope for the development of societal powers at the expense of the state power. However, this has been filtered and controlled by the elites. Even this process of power sharing got the legitimacy from the West, those who are thinking of exporting democracy to different parts of the world under the banner of globalisation.

The first decade of post-Soviet Russia’s development has created a space at least for the analytical understanding of state-society relations. Society has been
focused not only in relation to the state, but also in favour of individuals to protect their rights and liberties. This is becoming more prevalent due to the expansion/extension of the meaning/concept of liberty and rights of individual with the new approaches in: justice, human rights, environmental rights, and cultural rights. The state has already reached its plateau and society has just picked up its pace, which is moving much faster in western societies. Russian society shows the existence of violent tendencies that are suppressed by the elite-state apparatus. The developments in the last decade have brought the society to its forefront and created conditions for a better tomorrow.