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Opposition Parties in Hybrid Regimes: Between Repression and Co-optation: The Case of Russia's Regions

ROSTISLAV TUROVSKY

Laboratory for Regional Political Studies, Higher School of Economics, Russia

ABSTRACT *In this article the author analyses the intricate combination of repression and co-optation policies conducted by Russia's ruling elites in their relations with the opposition on the regional level. As the study shows the structural features of electoral authoritarianism not only ensure the victories of 'approved' candidates but also make the rare oppositional winners to adapt to the existing regime and change the political affiliation. If the regime gets more authoritarian the oppositional party can still be a tool to win a local election. But after being elected, the winner finds himself in another political environment of existing patron–client relations, and has no other choice than to become a dependent member, or an agent (according to principal–agent theory) in higher-level clientele. As a result, oppositional party has become useless in the recruitment of influential executive power elite. However, while blocking unwanted 'invasion' of opposition into the executive power the regime allows opposition to be presented in the leadership of regional legislative power. This policy reflects the necessity to make an opposition more loyal and included into the system of power relations in most safe and efficient for the ruling elite way.*

KEY WORDS: Party system, dominant party, opposition, co-optation, repression, spoils, patron–client relations, principal–agent relations, regional power

Introduction

The Russian party system has formally turned into a dominant one as has been confirmed by the 2011 Duma elections where the party gained victory for a third consecutive time (thereby meeting Sartori's (1976) criterion for dominant party rule, despite suffering a

Correspondence Address: Rostislav Turovsky. Rublevskoje shausse, 30, bld. 1, apt. 87. 121609, Moscow, Russia. Email: rft777@mail.ru

Academic biography. Born in 1970 in Moscow, Russia. Graduated from Faculty of Geography, Moscow State University in 1992. Received Ph.D. degrees in political science in 1995 (candidate in Russian system) and 2007 (doctor in Russian system). Lectured political geography and regional politics at Moscow State University: Faculty of Geography, Faculty of Philosophy and then Faculty of Political Science (1995–2012). Professor at Moscow State University (Faculty of Political Science) in 2009–2011. Held the position of vice-president of Russian Political Science Association in 2008–2012. At the moment works as a professor at Faculty of Applied Political Science and heads the Laboratory for Regional Political Studies at Higher School of Economics, also serves as vice-president at Centre for Political Technologies. Academic interests: regional and local politics, federal institutions in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, comparative subnational elections.

decline in the officially declared electoral support from 64.2% in 2007 to 49.3%. United Russia's political domination also looks strong at the regional level where almost all of the governors are party members (or supporters) and the same is true for the majority of the regional deputies. In terms of elite recruitment membership of United Russia (UR) has become an important factor in career advancement. UR membership reflects the structure of regional elites and may be considered in many respects to be an oversized governing coalition, as some researchers call hegemonic or dominant parties (see Magaloni, 2006). However, while United Russia includes most of the prominent figures and clientele, the party's electoral support is limited and has begun to fall after its 2007 peak, and this leaves significant space for the other parties, at least in terms of electoral participation and party/faction-building. How the opposition's political resources are used and/or wasted in hybrid (or explicitly authoritarian) regimes is a very interesting topic for political studies.

Since every party seeks power, in theory, the opposition in Russia's regime has to make the hard choice of either being incorporated into the existing system of power or openly resisting the authorities in the hope of one day gaining enough mass support to win in its own right. Comparative studies of authoritarian regimes still lack evidence and explanation regarding this choice between incorporation (collaboration) and resistance. In turn, United Russia and its patrons from the presidency/executive power have the power to decide which parties (and personalities) are to be included or excluded from representation in the State Duma, regional legislatures or municipal assemblies.

There is a growing debate in the literature on the reasons why some authoritarian regimes co-opt the opposition while others repress it (Gandhi, 2008). For example Gandhi argues that the opposition that is strong enough to threaten the regime but not so strong as to take power is more likely to be co-opted.

As our study shows, the Russian party system is not simply polarized by a 'party of power – opposition' cleavage but instead presents many different examples of inter-party relations ('party of power' being a Russian term meaning not just the officially governing party but rather a ruling elite institutionalized by means of parties and other political movements in search for electoral victories; see Liechtenstein, 2002). Opposition in Russia may be both repressed and co-opted (on the level of parties as a whole or certain political leaders in these parties), and this fact reflects in our opinion the complex nature of Russia's type of authoritarian regime. Russian regions present an excellent laboratory for studying different cases. Thus, for example, the same parties can be included in the ruling bloc in one region while repressed in another. Or the same party in the same region can be included at one time and excluded at other times – for example, after new elections.

Why is this power distribution so unstable? The answer is probably to be found in the emerging and developing, but purposefully unfinished authoritarianism where the regime has a strong need for democratic legitimacy both its relations with the West and to maintain public support. Russian political elites are not ready yet to recognize the regime as authoritarian, preferring to talk about another kind of democracy instead (concept of 'sovereign democracy' worked out by Surkov who was considered one of key ideologists of this regime; see Chadaev, 2006). This feature reflects the unfinished and then reversed legacy of the democratic transition which started with *perestroika*. Thus, the opposition has always some room for co-optation, and its size is what changes. One should remember that prominent oppositional politicians used to be co-opted even into the federal government under Yeltsin (e.g., Tuleev and Maslyukov) and

all left-wing Duma speakers (Rybkin, then Seleznev) were commonly accused of collaboration with the 'regime'.

The uneven power distribution between two branches (executive and legislative) and tiers (regional and municipal) allows us to analyse the deeper differences in the politics of the opposition's inclusion/exclusion. We argue that the opposition is more likely to be included in the power distribution inside the weaker power bodies, bearing in mind that the Russian political system unevenly distributes the power in favour of executive power and higher territorial levels of power. So the opposition is more likely to be represented in ruling positions in legislative bodies.

Our analysis of the legislative power in all the 83 regional cases shows that the place of three of the other larger parties (left CPRF, populist LDPR, and centre-left Fair Russia) in regional politics is very different and ever changing (Reuter & Turovsky, 2011). These parties are not truly oppositional, nor are they loyal to United Russia and/or regional governors. Very different was their attitude towards governors, when deputies voted on approval of the candidate, proposed by the president (under the previous system of governors' nominations). In more than half of the regions, United Russia decided to grant other parties some spoils. At the same time regional executive power is closed to the opposition.

Regional differences significantly depend, as we suggest, on the place of the political leaders within regional clientelist networks. The Russian party system is not a product of classic Western-style party-building. Rather it is a historically new and unstable combination of parties which appeared due to both the 'usual' ideological cleavages and the activities of influence groups striving for political institutionalization (formed around business and other interest groups, certain ambitious or rent-seeking personalities, etc). Clientelism lies at the core of many political connections and enables informal ties, mutual interests and pragmatic deals both inside the parties and in interactions of different parties' affiliates. Alternatively, conflicts in this system can produce severe party struggles. Most experts believe that patron–client networks based on personal relationships are what count most in structuring of the regional party systems. However, there is a serious methodological problem in verification of arguments based on personal-level explanations. Evaluations of regional experts and political actors can be extremely fruitful for this but they do not give a full and reliable explanation. Another way is the simple analysis of biographies in order to find when and where individual actors got together, but it has its obvious flaws as it proves only the personal connections but cannot reveal their character and depth. The theory of patron–client relations also goes well in argumentation but there is a strong need to explain what attracts certain clients to their patrons, how strong are the bonds and what interests are they based upon. Very often these bonds are based on corruption that is apparently not the kind of thing that outsiders are allowed to analyse in detail, political scientists amongst them. Anyway we have no choice but to improve our knowledge and understanding of inter-personal (or patron–client, and in most definite cases of affiliations – principal–agent) relations to get more accurate analysis of regional political interactions and their outcomes such as the place and the role of opposition in power or beyond.

Oppositional parties themselves manoeuvre between two strategies, each of them having their own reasons (we emphasize that this is not a choice that is made but a manoeuvre that ever changes). They need to look oppositional to attract the voters and they need to play their role in the political recruitment giving their activists an opportunity to catch positions in existing power. However, still without chances to win the elections (except for the

municipal level) oppositional parties usually cannot do without double-dealing with United Russia. For the opposition in Russia this is still a closed circle with a possible negative outcome in loss of public support as the society starts to heat up again (it became clear at the 2012 presidential elections when the leaders of all three supposedly oppositional parties performed poorly).

In this article, we use results of our studies in Russian regional politics in post-Soviet times in order to understand the ‘oppositionness’ as we prefer to call the subject we study, and how it changes in the course of regime change. The regional tier of Russian politics is especially interesting since the victories of oppositional parties and candidates have always been possible in some regions and municipalities, where oppositional electoral behaviour is combined with less rigid authoritarian control. ‘Oppositionness’ also covers the continuum of cases of the opposition’s co-optation into the ruling regime, ranging from zero to full loyalty. In the system with a dominant party we tackle only issues concerning parties other than United Russia and significant in their political representation, leaving oppositional civic movements for other studies.

Opposition in Comparative Political Studies

Comparative political studies of authoritarian and hybrid regimes usually focus on the overall regime features and the rise and sustainability of dominant parties. For example, Magaloni in her study of the Mexican party system reveals the mechanics of hegemonic party autocracy. She focuses on the institutionalization and monopolization of mass support, the role of economic performance, mentioning also electoral fraud and barriers to entry as common places in such studies (Magaloni, 2006).

Oppositional parties in authoritarian regimes are less studied. Very often they are idealized as ‘freedom fighters’ but this underestimates their opportunistic behaviour and even their role in providing *de facto* support for the regime. Robust party competition (as Grzymala-Busse calls it) becomes a matter of favourable conditions (meaning unfavourable trends for the ruling party). This differs from the situation in post-communist democracies where such a competition has become a constant and serious constraint to state exploitation by the ruling parties (Grzymala-Busse, 2007).

The theme of opposition in Russian politics is widely discussed. Since the 1990s, the discourse has included the theme of so-called ‘system’ opposition as contrary to the ‘non-system’ or ‘anti-system’ opposition (presented by a group of non-registered radical organizations). In the 2000s, the opposition started to look very weak and we now have a huge record of its collaboration with the authorities – thus provoking some authors to speak about its extinction (Gel’man, 2004).

On the other hand, it would be wrong to say that the very phenomenon of opposition does not exist in Russia. One of the main reasons is electoral. The authorities enjoy rather high but not totalistic support, as all polls and most electoral results show. The share of unsatisfied voters is significant and will probably rise further, as revealed by the 2011 and 2012 national elections. Besides, ideological cleavages are still relevant and controversies over Russia’s future and reforms still go on even inside the dominant party. So, oppositional activists are not merely cynical pragmatists ready and willing to be ‘bought’ by the rulers at any time.

However, it is impossible to divide Russian politicians and parties into ruling and oppositional ones. Opposition in pluralist democracy does not hold power but has a chance to

come to power by means of fair elections. Regular democratic change of power is in the core of any democracy. In authoritarian regimes it is different. In our view, ‘opposition-ness’ is a more adequate phenomenon to study authoritarian regimes than the opposition, understood as a group of political actors willing to take power from the rulers. ‘Opposition-ness’ derives from the Russian *oppozitsionnost’* and it is about the scale of for/against relation towards the ruling elite and inclusion into this elite.

Our study leads to the conclusion that under an authoritarian (or hybrid) regime the local electoral victory is a trap for opposition as it increases the level of political instability (not to be confused with the democratic power change), since a local opposition-led regime cannot co-exist with the federal rulers and their loyal supporters on the spot. Moreover, as our studies show any change of governor in the regime that is based on patron–client relations leads to more complicated network of clientele and usually to more conflicts. This means that the ‘oppositional’ regional regime is less stable both inside and in its relations with the federal centre. In reality, to get rid of alienation and fragility many such regimes search for adaptive tactics which may entail a change of their party of choice and the demonstration of full loyalty towards the federal centre (sometimes even more explicit than in ‘regular’ regional regimes). If no adaptation takes place, the oppositional-turned-ruling local leader fails and the difference is only in the countdown of the failure, be it a rapid loss of power or a long story of attempts to find a compromise. But in legislative power co-optation is still widespread which contrasts with the repression that takes place in executive power.

Under Medvedev even successful adaptation of former oppositional politicians among regional governors has ceased and most of them have lost power. The reason is in the beginning of the next period of elite transformation when members of the younger generations started to come to power replacing the older generation of oppositionists and loyalists. But it should be mentioned that the threat from the federal centre is not the only one for the opposition-led regional/local regime. Its amorphous and divided internal structure is another problem that should be studied better. But we should start with the regional legislative power where one can find much more cases of opposition and its accommodation in the existing regime.

Regional Deputies: An Easy Way to Surrender?

The legislative power in Russia has a certain political diversity but gives fewer opportunities for a political career. The case of executive power shows a polarized structure when it is almost impossible to keep this power for the oppositional party without losing either power or the loyalty of the winner. Legislative power is much more flexible, despite the formation of a dominant party system analysed in many studies both in Russia and abroad (Bogaards, 2004; Liechtenstein, 2002; Reuter & Turovsky, 2011). Russian regional legislatures still enjoy limited multiparty diversity due to both legislation (at least two parties should be presented according to law) and widespread oppositional voting resulting in a number of mandates (mostly obtained by means of party list voting).

Before analysing the oppositional presence in the regional legislatures, we should start with the electoral results and the shares of party factions. United Russia completely dominates the regional party systems. However, its electoral results are varied. In this article, we cover all the existing regional legislatures elected from 2007 up to December 2011.

United Russia is an obvious leader dominating both the voting breakdown and the deputies' number. The magnitude of United Russia electoral results ranges from 30.1% in Karelia up to 90.4% in Mordovia. In 46 regions, United Russia won more than a half of the votes (among these in nine regions it gained more than two thirds of the votes).

The position of United Russia within the legislatures is much stronger. The main reason is the widespread use of the so-called mixed electoral system (in most Russian regions half of the seats are kept by those elected in single-mandate (or sometimes multi-mandate) districts where United Russia candidates usually win). However, taking into consideration the rather high electoral threshold (usually 7%), voting in the party lists usually gives United Russia an opportunity to win more than half of the seats. Combining those elected on party lists with those elected in districts, United Russia can easily create the biggest faction in the legislature. Now in all the regions except St Petersburg, Karelia, and Amur region, United Russia holds an absolute (more than 50%) majority (in three regions mentioned it has the biggest faction though). It should be noted that in most regions United Russia's factions have more than two thirds of the seats (in 55 regions as our calculations show). The disproportion ratio (share of faction in the legislature divided by share of votes at the elections) reaches 1.89 in one of the regions.

Such a party structure of regional legislative bodies might have led to a deep polarization between the 'party of power' and the opposition. This could create a situation typical for many regimes with dominant parties in Africa and the Middle East, where the electoral authoritarianism combines one-party rule with the presence of a much smaller opposition. But political practices in Russia are more complicated. Undoubtedly, United Russia has the power to take the leadership in regional legislatures under its full control. However, the situation with the leadership is different. We analysed the distribution of the main posts in legislatures taking into consideration their chairpersons, vice-chairpersons and chairs of committees and commissions. This group of leaders has been analysed in all the existing legislatures. Our analysis shows that the regional legislatures fall into a system of patronage rather than reflect the 'typical' cleavage between the ruling party and the opposition. That is, the system of United Russia's patronage over the party system, as a subsystem of the executive power's patronage over both United Russia and all other parties. In other words, it is a system of multi-tier patronage executed by federal authorities, regional governors and United Russia's federal and regional structures.

In our opinion, the Russian party system cannot be called a classic dominant (or hegemonic) party system. The executive power being strongest as compared with its legislative counterpart is still formed on a non-party basis. It is most clear on the federal level where the president does not join the party. The principal feature of such a party system is that the role of 'dominant' party is limited. Its 'dominance' is confined to the weaker power bodies, such as the legislative power, regional governors and municipal heads. On the federal level, 'non-party' presidential and executive structures manage United Russia while staying above and behind the party. Moreover, they try to manipulate the whole party system and all the parties, not just one. Parties play their specific roles at the elections and for elite recruitment. Such features differentiate the Russian party system from many well-studied and more typical examples in Africa, Asia, and post-communist states of Central Asia, Azerbaijan etc (Bogaards, 2004; Magaloni, 2006).

Recently there has been a change in expert's opinions about the possible long-term development of the Russian party system. In the 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s experts used to talk about a possible two-party system based on strong left and

centre-right parties, with its precursors found in the CPRF and subsequently in the 'party of power.' More recently, experts have started to compare the Russian party system with the formal multiparty hegemonic systems of communist states, such as the GDR, where Putin used to work. But Russia's party system hardly resembles the system to be found in the former GDR or China, since the opposition parties and their activists are still largely independent and radical in their critique. But the truth is that United Russia carries out distributive politics through its power to decide who receives a share of the spoils. Such tactics are not novel for scholars studying authoritarian regimes where co-optation of the opposition is often seen as a primary tool to enhance political stability and regime legitimacy. Some authors point out the importance of elections in authoritarian regimes which are employed to provide legitimacy (though, there is another point that democratic elections can undermine the regime). At the same time researchers of Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes have noted that the importance of elections for authoritarian regimes is explained also by the fact that they often are used as tools to manipulate and manage the elites (Blaydes, 2011). Elections are also seen in terms of competitive clientelism (Lust-Okar, 2004) rather than multiparty competition, and this point seems useful for Russian studies too. Blaydes classifies the Egyptian elite under Mubarak's rule as a rent-seeking elite. However, not only rent-seeking but also the struggle for social status and prestige influenced the elite's type of political participation (this is very important for post-Soviet Russia with its newly emerging political establishment where personal ambition and a culture of supremacy in social relations still shape the political environment).

The clientelist nature and inner structure of United Russia is an interesting topic for further research, as well as its internal system of spoils distribution. Many analysts come to the conclusion that the nature of Russian parties has changed from ideological to clientelist representation (we analysed it on the example of regional legislative power and its elections, see Turovsky, 2006). So, competitive clientelism may be an appropriate concept to cover the structure of Russian party system. In this system, patronage relations evolve both inside United Russia as the biggest party with the large number of controlled spoils and in its relations with other parties. The distribution of spoils is obviously a tool used to buy off the opposition.

The analysis shows that United Russia uses two opposite strategies. In some cases, it is 'the winner takes it all' strategy (an analogue of majoritarian rule); while in others, it is consensus rule. At present the score is in favour of consensus rule (48 regions use consensus rule, and in 35 regions, the winner took all).

On the federal level, it is standard practice to distribute leadership positions among all the represented parties. In the previous convocation all the parties in the State Duma kept at least one vice-chairperson position and one committee chair position. In fact, the CPRF, LDPR and Fair Russia got only one vice-chairperson and one committee head each (United Russia's share in State Duma leadership was 88%). After the 2011 elections it was decided to give more concessions to the parliamentary opposition and United Russia's share in the leadership dropped significantly: United Russia holds positions of chairman, first vice-chairman, four vice-chairmen, 15 committee heads, CPRF got another first vice-chairman and 6 committees, Fair Russia – vice-chairman and 4 committees, LDPR – vice-chairman and 4 committees too (United Russia's share dropped to 55%). From this point, regional party systems are more polarized, because in 35 regions there are oppositional parties deprived of any significant leadership positions (it may be correct to take into consideration also deputy chairpersons of committees and commissions, but

these positions are of too small importance). In most regions, where consensus rule is applied, United Russia does not grant all the parties leadership positions but chooses its partners among them. But cases of non-polarized systems and multiparty groupings are wide-spread leading to a more intricate structure and diversity of 'power-opposition' relations.

The rare use of a 'full coalition' indicates another important feature. United Russia patronage is not at all a guarantee that each party represented will have a share of the spoils. Rather it is a regional choice of 'friends' and 'foes' depending on the relations between regional party organizations and their loyalty or readiness for collaboration. This is a better way to divide and rule the party system. The reasons for: (a) the choice of strategy itself, and (b) the choice of specific partners are very interesting.

A 'full coalition' is not frequent – in nine regions all four 'parliamentary' parties hold leadership positions (including Karelia where there are five such parties including Yabloko). Of course, leadership distribution is far from fair as it is disproportional regarding the distribution of seats. Therefore, it is not a proportional distribution but a decision of a patron to grant some parties with a few posts in order to turn them into clients. Usually such parties will be rewarded with only one leadership position. Often it is a rather formal post of one of vice-speakers. Or it may be one of the less important committees. Thus even consensus rule in reality means the unrivalled dominance of United Russia. The only example of a region where United Russia has less than half of the leadership positions is Karelia.

Nevertheless, if it is a sort of 'multiparty' deal it is important to understand which 'oppositional' parties joined the coalition and why. The configuration of such 'coalitions' is very different and changes from one region to another. One striking feature is the role of the communists who claim to be the one and only genuine opposition party in Russia. However, in 32 regions they have a share of leadership positions. Fair Russia shares power in 24 regions and the LDPR in 25 regions.

Let us try and understand why United Russia prefers to make a choice in favour of other parties when it is distributing leadership posts. In our opinion, this is a 'soft' kind of strategy for the dominant party (being different from the 'hard' strategy when the winner takes it all). However, such 'soft' strategies are very different from the consensus rule resembling consocial democracies outlined by Lijphart in his study of plural societies (Lijphart, 1997).

The main task of the authoritarian dominant party in the Russian regime is to neutralize the opposition by giving it a small share of power for a number of reasons. This helps reduce public criticism of United Russia. Also United Russia shares with the others responsibility for unpopular policies. One more reason is the legitimacy of unfair elections. Smaller parties often claim the elections to be unfair and fraudulent. By joining the coalition with United Russia they legitimate the electoral results and they become reluctant to discuss details of such electoral manipulation and fraud. Therefore, the neutralization of the opposition and the legitimization of elections are two of the main goals of United Russia's 'consensus' strategy. The third goal as we will show later is the distribution of leadership positions to local personalities, clienteles, their leaders, and representatives standing behind the parties.

At the regional level almost all the governors are United Russia members and as a result the party is usually ruled by the governor's clientele. This is the reason why the regional executive power tends to spread one-party rule for the legislatures (and why other clienteles can join other parties). However, many governors prefer to manipulate as many parties as

they can in order to control the political process in the region. Such a policy became typical at the time of governors' elections when governors tried to minimize the presence of oppositional candidates. In many regions, incumbent governors escaped the competition with communists after bargaining, and sometimes were even granted open support from CPRF. Now it is easier to control Fair Russia and LDPR turning them into loyal and weak political groups. The 'game' with the communists is more sophisticated. However, in many regions governors and United Russia are still able to work out a peace treaty with the communists as the case of regional legislatures shows.

The political opposition in such regional regimes faces the hard choice between more open and radical 'oppositionness' and partial inclusion into the ruling group. The pros and cons are as follows.

Full oppositionness (i.e., freewill or forced exclusion) has electoral and ideological reasons helping to mobilize the voters and local party activists. In case of fairer elections and stronger opposition, this can lead to victory. In fact, these victories can be found at the mayoral elections and in a small part of the single-mandate districts. This is not much, but still is an opportunity for many members of the opposition.

Inclusion has its own set of motives. Under electoral authoritarianism, it gives a chance to win a spoil (i.e., power and the status). This creates a motive for higher-ranking party leaders (who usually get the spoils). Also opportunism helps to attract elites (business elites mainly) that may seek a way to get a mandate and a spoil and are ready to sponsor the party for that goal. Parties that can prove their ability to win mandates can often put themselves up for sale to the highest bidder, as has been the case with the LDPR and Fair Russia. Rent-seeking elites sometimes face restrictions from United Russia and look for easier (and cheaper) ways to buy power through sponsoring other parties. Being rational in its decision-making business, elites can literally 'buy' almost any of the regional party branches. Again, this may be considered another type of co-adaptation strategy, as parties tone down their ideologies and try to look pragmatic in order to attract as wide a range of sponsors as possible. As our analysis of the biographies of deputies shows, most LDPR and Fair Russia deputies come from the business sector. The CPRF which is more ideological tries to strike a balance between the demands of its party activists and its business members and supporters. The problem of including members of the economic elite is that businesses can be extremely vulnerable in a corrupt and state-controlled system and no businessperson can be successful while openly criticizing the authorities. Resolving the urgent sponsorship problem an oppositional party has no other way than to collaborate with the authorities since most sponsors cannot and do not want to stand up to the state's pressure.

Collaboration means less pressure on the party and its sponsors and gives more access to the media (due to lack of an independent media) and to the electorate (since the police can block oppositional gatherings, and regional/local authorities can deny a party the right to hold a meeting). But choice in favour of inclusion creates new problems. The electorate may turn away from such a party. The very distribution of spoils builds pressure within the party, since only the party elite and rent-seeking newcomers get a share of the spoils.

Thus, each party has to make a difficult choice. United Russia decides to take it all or to select its coalition partners. The opposition decides whether to take a spoil or refuse. However, the latter choice is not that difficult. Our expert interviews did not reveal any cases when the opposition openly turned down such an invitation from United Russia. Rather it tries to explain to voters and activists why it deals with the 'enemy'. So, it is important only to understand the reasons of United Russia's choice. As both strategies

of United Russia are widespread, it is important to hypothesize on the reasons for their particular choice (see also Reuter & Turovsky, 2011).

The first group of factors are electoral. It may seem that the stronger the opposition the more reasons United Russia has to make it a partner (taking into consideration Gandhi's argument). In our analysis, we calculated the effective number of electoral parties (ENP) using the formula of Juan Molinar (this formula better suits dominant party systems, as it returns indices, which are very close to the real number of relevant parties; see Molinar, 1991). In 33 regions, ENP is less than 1.5. In 17 regions out of these 33, United Russia uses majoritarian rule. If the level of electoral competition rises, United Russia starts to use the consensus rule more often. If ENP exceeds 2.0 there are only 10 regions out of 32 where United Russia takes it all.

Therefore, at first glance, the situation seems clear. If electoral competition is low, it stimulates United Russia's decision not to share leadership positions with other parties. But, as United Russia is not obliged to do so, it can keep all the leadership positions even where it wins less of the votes and the competition is rather high. On the other hand, there are regions with very low electoral competition and high United Russia support which are also characterized by consensus rule.

Despite many exceptions, the level of electoral competition is the strongest factor explaining the choice of United Russia's strategy. The correlation coefficient between United Russia share of leadership positions and share of its faction is 0.53. The correlation with the share of the popular votes is smaller but is still at 0.41. However, since this factor is not so strong and exceptions are many, it is intriguing to calculate the level of disproportion of United Russia's leadership positions. The share of United Russia leadership positions divided by the share of votes is unsurprisingly high. It reaches 2.7 in Pskov oblast (and it is more than 2.0 in 25 regions). The share of United Russia leadership positions divided by the share of United Russia's faction is more moderate. Disproportion is at its highest in St. Petersburg (1.8) and exceeds 1.5 in 7 regions. In 18 regions the share is quite fair and differs from 0.9 to 1.1. This coincides with a significant correlation between the share of leadership positions and faction members.

However, there is another group of factors which we need to consider filling in the gaps in the above analysis. There is a strong need for an individual level analysis. It is important not only which parties get spoils but which individuals in these parties are the beneficiaries. The reason for this is related to the structure and specific character of the Russian party system. Earlier we mentioned that even United Russia had a limited influence being the biggest part of the party system managed from 'above'. It is understood by elites, that the electoral support of United Russia is limited and that other parties will always have a share of the votes and mandates. As a result, political parties partially (CPRF to a smaller degree) represent groups of regional elites, and their ideology loses its importance. Another dimension of any regional legislature is not just the party/faction structure but also the structure of its clientele. United Russia may be divided into several such groups being a replica of the most influential elites. Other parties may be partly or fully controlled by such a group, or a group can be represented both in United Russia and in other parties. Therefore, the strategy of clientele is to get seats in a legislature using the party system as a whole and not only via providing support to United Russia (with its limitations in terms of electoral support and its bias towards those groups that control the regional leadership, usually the governor's group).

Our analysis shows that it is famous personalities and representatives of particular clienteles who usually get the leadership positions and are included in the system of power. The

case of Fair Russia that has often been seen as United Russia's 'second column' is very clear. Often it is represented in leadership posts by deputies who are loyal to governors and United Russia. LDPR often finds itself in the same situation. We would expect the CPRF to be the most complicated case because in many regions it stands openly against governors. Partly this is explained by the position of the ordinary party members, the majority of whom are against any double-dealing with the regional authorities (whilst the party leaders are more in favour of bargaining). If the CPRF gets leadership positions then usually they are reserved for the well-known and experienced politicians who are also professional deputies and have many personal ties to the regional elites. Some of them held positions in the Soviet nomenklatura and they continue to seek leadership positions.

Thus, loyalties towards the governors, political experience and/or representation of influential interest groups are the factors that have allowed deputies from CPRF, Fair Russia and LDPR to gain leadership posts. Another factor is the willingness of an influential opposition deputy (party branch leader for example) to strike a deal with United Russia and win power.

Overall, the evolution of choice between consensus and one-party rule is still unclear. Legislatures elected in 2006 were split almost evenly, in 2007, the score was even. In 2008, with the rise in support for United Russia, one-party rule was more wide-spread.

Especially interesting was the situation under Medvedev who made some steps towards higher party competition. United Russia formed coalitions in 9 of the 12 regional assemblies which held elections in March 2009. Moreover, in his address to the federal parliament in 2009, Medvedev started a small-scale political reform that was aimed to give other parties more opportunities to be represented in regional legislatures and to form its leadership. On 12 November 2009 in his address Medvedev said that: 'All the parties presented in regional parliaments will have an opportunity to create factions. It should be guaranteed for all that their representatives will work on a permanent basis and have leadership positions' (<http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/5979>, accessed 29 May 2013). The first part of this phrase was later enacted as a law. Now even if a party has only one deputy, such a deputy has the same rights as a faction. But the second part is almost void. As it was before, United Russia decides how to distribute leadership positions and also who works on a full time professional basis. After the 2010 elections, in seven regions United Russia chose one-party rule, and in seven regions it formed coalitions. In 2010, the balance in several regions turned from coalitional to one-party rule.

However, the year 2011 became an important turning point for co-optation policy and stimulated United Russia to share its legislative power with other parties. The reason for this was clear – United Russia started to lose electoral support. From this perspective the December 2011 round of regional elections was more important than those which took place in March. The former went better for United Russia and its distributive policy did not change. But after December 2011 the number of regions where United Russia did not get an absolute majority of deputies increased to three and United Russia's factions diminished in most regions. This made United Russia become more flexible in its relations with other parties.

Oppositional Governors: The Way to Extinction

Politics on regional level is crucially important both for the formation and for the constraints of opposition-building in Russia. With the beginning of governors' and mayors'

elections in 1996, the left-wing opposition as well as other oppositional groups got an opportunity to grab some power. More favourable institutional conditions (fairer elections) and higher level of communists' electoral support made that short period of time the starting point for the 'oppositional' regional governments (almost all of them were headed by CPRF and its supporters).

There is an extensive literature on the transformation of Russian political regime after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Initially the authors used the theory of democratic transition viewing Russia as a political system on its way to democracy (Karl & Schmitter, 1994; Linz & Stepan, 1996). The governors' and mayors' elections were understood as one of the crucial turning points to democratic development. But obvious flaws in the democratic transition has led to the change of main paradigms as the transition to democracy stopped on the way and failed. As a result, the Russian political regime has been considered to be a kind of hybrid or just authoritarian regime (with the use of such concepts as electoral authoritarianism, competitive authoritarianism and the like; see Levitsky & Way, 2002; Schedler, 2006; Golosov, 2008; Ross, 2011). In our studies of sub-national Russian politics, we argue that the elements of centralization and the formation of a hybrid regime were apparent from the very start of the transition in 1991 (Turovsky, 2007).

Two strong limitations for 'oppositional' rule at the sub-national level appeared from the very start. The first is the limitation on political pluralism that led to the impossibility to create any sub-national regime that could differ ideologically from the national regime. The Kremlin clearly opposed those politicians who ran for governors from the oppositional side, as was shown at 1996 governors' elections, when the presidential administration supported its list of candidates (mainly the incumbents, previously appointed by Yeltsin). It easily proved to be impossible to create any local regime that could promote the programme of the CPRF or any other oppositional party.

The second limitation is the inability of autonomous and self-sustained sub-national rule. This limitation is caused by wide regional variations in the levels socio-economic development and by centralized resource redistribution. Such distributive policy also had clear political and electoral reasons, since it helped to boost the support for the regime in the vast Russian periphery. It has become common knowledge that such distributive policy was heavily influenced by patron–client ties between the centre and the certain governors. Budget flows were seen as a reward for loyalty and electoral results, as the elections started to show even from 1993 referenda and Duma elections. Oppositional regional regimes started with populist and paternalist programmes, which gave them popular support. However, lack of resources and financial dependence on the federal government made it impossible to fund the vast expenditures that such programmes entailed. These contradictions led to a very unpleasant situation for the oppositional leaders who became governors. Oppositional governors could not follow their ideology and their electoral promises. From our point of view, there are four political outcomes for 'oppositional' governors under overall regime structural conditions with their limitations on 'oppositionness'.

The first outcome is the low and falling legitimacy of 'oppositional' regional regimes. It led to the loss or low level of public support for governors. The 'oppositional' governors started to lose popular support since they broke their promises. Most 'oppositional' regimes had very limited and/or low legitimacy from the very start (as electoral data showed) and looked weaker and more fragmented than their 'mainstream' loyalist counterparts did. Some of the 'oppositional' governors failed quickly when they could not be re-elected for the second term. Some of them lingered longer but lost their third terms, like Lyubimov

in Ryazan region. In most cases, ‘oppositional’ governors originally came to power with limited electoral support, because they won highly competitive elections defeating more or less strong incumbents often in the second round. The support for CPRF that usually backed them was not so high and many candidates lacked charisma.

The second outcome was the loss of support from their own party. The ‘oppositional’ governors tended to be non-party rule rather than to ‘communist’ rule. Among the reasons for this situation was the search for more legitimacy for the new regime and the need to build a professional, rather than a ‘political’ regional government in order to tackle the economic problems as regional economy was usually in a state of shambles.

On the regional level, the ‘oppositional’ governors lost support from CPRF partly or fully, as they turned down ideology in their policies and refused to fill up the regional administration with communists. Considering their policies there was no clear evidence that ‘red’ governors were different from the ‘regulars’ (Lavrov & Kuznetsova, 1997). Most governors, no matter how they were affiliated with the parties, tried to use their limited financial resources to please the public sector and get the electoral support by means of their social policies in order to win the next term (usual pork barrel politics, or the feedback in political system cycle). Most of the governors who ruled under the poor economic conditions of the 1990s pursued ‘socially-oriented’ policies in order to gain electoral support (most governors followed the typical political business cycle raising social expenditures before elections). Meanwhile they could not change much in the region and it showed up to the dissatisfaction of the CPRF and its supporters. The result was in the widespread, sometimes open and harsh critics of governors from the side of CPRF activists and even the leaders of CPRF regional branches.

On the federal level, the ‘red’ governors initially enjoyed the full support from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). In the 1990s and after Zyuganov’s failure at the 1996 presidential elections, the policy of CPRF was aimed at getting as much power on the sub-national level as it was possible (to grow into the power from below, as it was commonly said by party officials). In conflicts, the highest party officials usually backed the governors protecting them from critics. However, this ‘honeymoon’ gradually ended, since the cautious governors showed no signs of love towards the federal party leadership. The typical case of the 2000s was the growing and open tension between ‘red’ governors and CPRF leader Zyuganov.

The third outcome lies in the rather low professional competence of ‘oppositional’ regimes and/or their inadequacy in terms of the emerging (capitalist) economic regime. Many ‘oppositional’ governors came to power as populists with no experience in regional governance. It was hard for them to recruit both party activists (who could be incompetent) and professional bureaucracy (that could be disloyal). In our studies, we demonstrated that in the 1990s most ‘red’ governors either left untouched a significant part of the membership of previous government or recruited new officials from different elite groups but not from CPRF (Turovsky, 1998). In any case, their administrations were often unstable with constant changes of officials. Obviously Russian regions could not be the examples of institutionalized opposition with ‘ready-to-go’ shadow governments.

Finally, the fourth outcome derives from the clientelist structure of power relations in Russia, which has become one of the main features of Russian politics (Biryukov, 2009). The ‘oppositional’ regimes were usually the most fragmented in terms of elite cohesion. The elections won by new governors were usually highly competitive and the losers with their clienteles did not disappear after the conclusion of the elections. Moreover, the

regional opposition towards the 'oppositional' governor could be very strong and supported by business and/or the federal centre. Rarely could the 'red' governors bring together all the clienteles. Rather, they had to build their own clienteles which complicated the structure of elites. Apparently, after the governors' elections were abolished, the struggle for appointments in such regions was usually the fiercest.

Thus, the 'oppositional' governors had to meet and fight back a lot of challenges that could be lethal for their careers. In the worst cases the governor faced problems from all sides, i.e., in their relations with (a) the public, (b) the federal authorities, (c) their own party (CPRF), (d) the oppositional regional clienteles. Such developments brought about instability and risks not only for the governors but also for regional political and economic development. We would suggest that the only way to success (i.e., stability in power) for an 'oppositional' governor was to choose an adaptation strategy which usually entailed a break-up with the Governor's oppositional party. The goal was to fit more or less smoothly into the regime, both at the institutional and individual levels.

As a result, avoiding the risk of pressure from almost everywhere and rationalizing the above-mentioned factors, the 'oppositional' governors started to look for their own ways of political survival adapting to the dominant regime conditions and creating their own clientelistic ties with the federal authorities, economic corporations and local elites.

In terms of the famous Hirschman triad of reactions on unstable organizational conditions (voice, exit, loyalty), Russian 'oppositional' governors chose the latter (Hirschman, 1970). The voice (of opposition) in theory could bring more electoral support at the next elections, but under authoritarian regime could lead to an end, one way or another. The critics of the federal authorities at the sub-national elections of 1995–1999 could be very fierce even from the side of the established regional officials. But it was self-censored anyway and meant to attract voters during electoral campaigns.

The exit was tried by some governors, who refused to run for a second term. The best example here is Kondratenko who was the very popular left-nationalist governor of Krasnodar reg. He did not participate at the 2000 regional elections. However, the exit actually was combined with loyalty. Those who left office and ceded to those who were backed by the federal authorities, were often rewarded by more minor posts. Thus, for example, Kondratenko was made a senator (member of the Federation Council) from his region, appointed by United Russia's regional authorities.

Undoubtedly, loyalty is the main way of adaptation for an 'oppositional' governor. Loyalty towards the federal government was obviously the most essential factor for survival combined with the building of clientelist ties with federal bureaucrats.

Back in 1996, those governors who came to power with the support of the opposition but were not party members found themselves in a more favourable situation and were able to shake off undesirable leftist support. Soon after elections in 1996, Gustov from Leningrad region and Tsvetkov from Magadan region held press conferences where they expressed explicit loyalty towards the federal centre (Turovsky, 1998).

Public rhetoric of 'oppositional' governors also changed after the elections. New regional officials clearly expressed their loyalty to hierarchical power. While interviewed by the author, one of high-ranking regional bureaucrats, and the leader of the regional CPRF branch at the same time, pointed at a portrait of President Putin's saying that from now on Putin became the supreme leader for him. Regarding the 'new' policy of his administration Volgograd's communist governor Maksyuta said in public that it did not matter what method he would use to develop the region, 'communist' or 'capitalist'.

The main thing for him was pragmatism rather than ideology – to use an ‘effective’ method as he pointed it out.

The topic of centre-regional clientelist connections is still poorly examined in Russia. However, there was much empirical evidence demonstrating that the ‘red’ governors tried to become a part of the clientelist system emerging in the process of privatization. They understood that being alienated in this system would be political death for them. It is interesting that some of them indicated in public their desire to be ‘like others’ and not some kind of ‘red sheep in the family’. Thus for example, the radical communist governor of Bryansk region Lodkin in his interview to the government sponsored newspaper, ‘*Rossiiskaya gazeta*’ said that he was a ‘normal man’ and not an ‘orthodox’ politician (Turovsky, 1998).

The politics of clientelist integration had two dimensions. Firstly, the governors were looking for their partners and patrons in the federal government. It would be correct to talk about mutual co-adaptation strategies. While the federal government was becoming more conservative and pragmatic, it was easier to cooperate on both sides. It developed under Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and continued under Putin. One way or another, all the ‘oppositional’ governors tried to be loyal and to be a part of a nationwide patron–client system that developed in place of formal federative relations. There is much evidence about the interactions of ‘red’ governors and Chernomyrdin (visits to the regions, favourable decisions etc.) who conducted more pragmatic policy in comparison with that pursued by former Prime Minister, Egor Gaidar.

Secondly, the ‘oppositional’ governors in the new ‘capitalist’ regime were inevitably engaged in the privatization processes (that was going on under bureaucratic control) and could not escape relations with business (otherwise risking to get it in opposition to them which could be lethal). Business–power relations is a theme widely discussed in Russian and international sources. Often the authors come to conclusion that the business groups have been playing very important role in regional politics and even controlling regional governments (Zubarevich, 2002). The case of a ‘red’ governor is specific from this point, since such governors ‘in theory’ should stay away from oligarchs. But some ‘communist’ governors created close links with ‘capitalist’ tycoons. One example, is found in Volgograd where Maksyuta ruled the region from 1996 until 2010. He was an open supporter of LUKOIL, one of the biggest Russian oil companies. LUKOIL managers got top jobs in Maksyuta’s government, while the company itself employed the governor’s own son. Another example is Lyubimov who had close ties with TNK (Tyumen Oil Company) that owns the oil refinery in Ryazan. Lyubimov was a member of the board of directors of this company.

Expression of loyalty and integration into the emerging political and economic regime was one part of the adaptation strategies used by the ‘oppositional’ governors. Another part can be found in their party politics and role in the transformation of the party system. The institutionalization of post-Soviet parties has been a gradual process. In the 1990s as the electoral results show, the CPRF was the most popular party but its public support was limited due to widespread anti-Communist sentiments. Executive power heads preferred to stay ‘beyond’ or ‘above’ parties seeing parties as limiting the legitimacy of their personalistic regimes. Most regional regimes in the 1990s tended to be personalist and clientelist (Gel’man et al., 2000).

Focusing on ‘oppositional’ regimes one can see the same trend in their party and electoral politics, despite the fact that some governors were members of the CPRF. ‘Red’

governors changed their policy towards the federal elections. It was naïve to think that they would support the CPRF and reward it with spoils from their ‘administrative resources’. Even as far back as the 1996 presidential elections, the only CPRF affiliate of that time, Ryabov in Tambov region stayed away from the campaign while letting two of his deputies head the campaigns of his two main rivals, Yeltsin and Zyuganov. Later on, at 1999 Duma elections, ‘red’ governors usually let the communists campaign freely but rarely gave them any support. After 2000, such support became even more limited or ceased. Thus, ‘red’ governors also preferred to build ‘above party’ personalist regimes in order to strengthen their shaky legitimacy. In any case, most of them could still rely on CPRF support at the elections, since the CPRF did not risk ‘revenge’ by backing other candidates. However, it was interesting that on the individual level some communists could run against ‘red’ governors portraying them as ‘traitors’.

Regional clientelism of the ‘oppositional’ governors sometimes led to the creation of their own centrist ‘parties of power’, which they supported along with or instead of the CPRF. Starodubtsev in Tula region, while being a member of the CPRF created his own ‘party of power’ (the bloc ‘For Tula *krai*’) with his deputy Bogomolov in the lead. It is worth remembering that Starodubtsev was one of the key symbols of the communist movement. This example shows that each governor preferred to create a centrist ‘party of power’ (be it a United Russia branch or regional bloc) rather than support a party with ideological bias. In other words, clientelistic politics (hidden behind the centrist phraseology) always prevailed over party politics.

A dramatic change in the adaptation strategies of ‘oppositional’ governors came along with the change of the party system and the creation of United Russia. Previously the party politics of the federal centre was more flexible and allowed the governors to be members of different parties, paying more attention to their loyalty. Gradually it changed. Governors had to choose the new adaptation strategy. They could insist on their CPRF membership and run the risk of losing their posts. Alternatively, they could leave the ‘wrong’ party and then decide whether to stay ‘above parties’, or join United Russia.

Change of party affiliation was not new to the 2000s. In 1997, Bronevich who in 1996 had been elected governor of the Koryak Autonomous Okrug with the support of the CPRF, changed allegiance and headed the regional branch of Prime Minister Chernomyrdin’s party ‘Our Home is Russia’ – the Federal ‘party of power’. The Koryak AO was a remote region fully dependent on federal financial support, and its governor needed support from the federal government. After Putin’s centralization and the introduction of a dominant party regime, the factor of political dependency became relevant for all the regions.

The choice of a new strategy of survival for the governors should be analysed in a broader historical perspective. Before the formation of United Russia, most governors preferred to stay away from parties and follow the rules of personalist regional regimes (‘governor for all the people’ as some of them repeated). They could cling to parties of power such as ‘Our Home is Russia’, ‘Unity’, ‘Fatherland – All Russia’, conditions depending, but they followed the most widespread tactics of Russian political leaders to be ‘above’ parties in order to increase their legitimacy. Drastic federal-influenced change in party politics driven by Putin’s policy of elite consolidation forced the ‘above parties’ governors to join United Russia in 2003–2005 (Reuter, 2010). By March 2006, 70 governors had joined

the party. Reuter's study demonstrates that the 'weaker' governors tried to join United Russia first, and obviously most 'oppositional' governors were among the 'weaker'.

Under the new party system, the communists faced the hardest decision ever. Some of them decided to leave the party. In 2003, before the first Duma elections with United Russia participation, the CPRF was abandoned by Krasnodar governor Tkachev (who joined United Russia without any hesitations as he was not considered a true communist before) and Nizhny Novgorod governor Khodyrev. The latest of all was the controversial case of Kursk governor Mikhailov who had a long history as an active communist (he had first been elected Duma deputy in 1993 and was a member of the party's Central Committee at the time of his election as Governor in 2000). However, even Mikhailov left the CPRF for United Russia and in reward he gained another term, being appointed by Putin in 2005 (and then by Medvedev in 2010).

For the 'pink' governors (those, who came to power with communist support but were not party members) the task was much easier both politically and psychologically. Usually they followed a 'pragmatic' path from the beginning of their careers as governor and distanced themselves from the CPRF. The most interesting was the case of the very popular Kemerovo governor Tuleev who was included in the top CPRF party list at the 1995 and 1999 Duma elections. However, Tuleev always had his own ambitions; he ran for president in 1991 and was going to but then refused to run in Zyuganov's favour. Tuleev combined oppositional populist rhetoric with the search for ways to adapt, and this was clearly shown in 1996–1997, when he became a federal minister in Chernomyrdin government (in charge of CIS integration) and was appointed Governor in 1997 as a federal bureaucrat and not an oppositional leader. At the 1999 federal elections, he was caught in double-dealing: while in the CPRF party list he gave part of his support to the Kremlin backed 'Unity' party which did very well in his region. This fact was particularly painful for the CPRF, because Tuleev was very popular and had the ability to mobilise voters to support the CPRF. In the 2000s, it was no surprise when Tuleev joined United Russia. Other 'pinks' also joined United Russia. In 2004 Kurgan governor Bogomolov became a member and later was appointed for another term. The same happened in Orenburg region with Chernyshev (former supporter of CPRF and the Agrarian party).

So, probably the best way of adaptation after the change of party system was to join United Russia. But apparently not all the 'oppositional' governors were ready for that because of their ideological views and fear of losing public support (despite the abolishment of elections they did care about it) after such a radical overturn. Here we come to the second phase of co-adaptation strategy. The main aim of Putin's regime was not to exclude communists or 'pinks' completely but rather to co-opt those who proved to be adaptable, at least for a while. As we argued, initially Putin tried to change the system of centre-regional relations rather than to change the governors on the personal level, and that brought about a lot of decisions in favour of incumbents (Turovsky, 2009). This showed in the case of two communists who were appointed governors in 2005 (Vinoogradov in Vladimir region and Chernogorov in Stavropol region). Putin demonstrated his readiness to work with communists, as a sort of goodwill gesture.

However, most 'reds' could not survive long in the new regime. The main reason, as we suggest, was not the ideology, but the inability to fit into the new clientelistic system. Analysis of those governors, who lost power under Putin, shows that the federal centre threw away many populists and political activists with a bad record of regional conflicts and mismanagement. On the first stage, the new authoritarian regime used judicial

power and electoral commissions to get rid of unwanted governors before the elections. Firstly, Rutskoi in Kursk region and then Lodkin in Bryansk region were excluded from the races, which seemed impossible before for an incumbent governor in his 'own' region. Others could not survive the new appointment policy and were replaced (Starodubtsev, Mashkovstev).¹ Even public conflict with the CPRF did not pay off for some of the governors who missed the chance of another term in office (Khodyrev, Tikhonov).

The gradual formation of a dominant party system could not make co-adaptation last long. Chernogorov ended up badly being unpopular and unable to stabilize the region. He lost at both ends, was excluded from CPRF and then was forced to leave the governor's office. Vinogradov declared in the beginning of 2008, before Medvedev's election that he froze his CPRF membership (the same was done by another 'last communist' Maksyuta in Volgograd region) and was appointed again, this time by Medvedev, despite protests from United Russia (however, he remained his party member as he clearly showed later). He has been the only case of a 'red' governor who really has survived for a long time (until his end of term in 2013) and not changed his 'colour'. Maksyuta left office at the end of his term in 2010.

The centralization of power and the dominant party regime brought about the new and final step in the evolution of 'oppositional' regional regimes – their extinction. Studies demonstrate that electoral performance became the main reason for a governor's appointment. Surely, that meant the performance of United Russia. As Reuter and Robinson argue, the loyalty of governors and their electoral results (success for UR) opened the way to re-appointments (Reuter & Robinson, 2012). After changes to the legislation on the appointment of governors under Medvedev it became even clearer, because the party winning the regional elections (i.e., United Russia) got the right to propose gubernatorial candidates to the president. For 'reds' this meant forced 'exit' (they usually were not included in the list of candidates) rather than the new term. For success, the loyalty had to be at its fullest (Mikhailov case in Kursk region).

Managing regional elites, the federal centre, however, used a policy that was more sophisticated than is found in 'regular' dominant party regime. The Kremlin never wanted all the governors to be members of United Russia. We see two reasons for this. The first coincides with Reuter's point on the sequence of governors' membership. It is also based on the suggestion that United Russia has limited power and is a political tool rather than a strong party. So, some influential federal-level politicians have been granted the privilege not to join the party. Another reason is the policy of federal authorities which seek to demonstrate that the regime maintains formal democratic institutions and allows ideological diversity. Such a policy was typical under president Medvedev. This results in a policy allowing very limited political diversity among the governors. In 2012–2013 this policy was confirmed with the appointment of LDPR and Fair Russia's governors in Smolensk and Zabaykalye regions respectively. Before this Medvedev appointed former leader of the liberal Union of Right Forces Belykh the governor of Kirov region creating a case of supposedly liberal governance.

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Notes

- ¹ The ‘oppositional’ governors were the targets of campaigns launched by the law-enforcement bodies. For example, in 2004 there was an investigation against Mashkovtsev. The leader of the Agrarian party Lapshin, whilst holding the post of Governor of Altay Republic, was also sued. Such cases had obvious political reasoning and were aimed at weakening the governors and stopping them from being re-appointment. Indeed, no governors who were investigated got their new terms of appointment.
- ² This article is also based on the numerous expert interviews the author has conducted since the mid 1990s in the regions.

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