

PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA

VICTOR A. KREMENYUK
Russian Academy of Sciences

This article gives an analysis of sources and moving forces of recent pro-democracy changes in Russia. While attributing high esteem to the new democratic elements in Russia, the author casts strong doubts to depth and durability of these changes since they were never backed by a strong grass-root movement and were primarily result of a policy from above. The author studies current state of affairs in building democratic society in Russia and presents a balanced view of advancements and shortcomings in this area, explaining the sources of still strong pro-Communist sympathies which were revealed during recent presidential election in Russia. An attempt to judge on possibilities of further democratic development in Russia ends the article.

INTRODUCTION

Prospects for democratic development in Russia continue to attract attention from both scholars and policy-makers worldwide. The end of the Cold War, which was dutifully associated with the beginning of democratic changes in the former Soviet Union (FSU) has had a strong impact on the world development. Though it can hardly be stated that the new world has become much safer or less contradictory, at least, the perspective of a nuclear war has become much more distant and even negligible and the ideological split of the global community does not exist any more with few exceptions in China, North Korea, and Cuba. Possibilities of a controllable and peaceful evolution of the world system have increased greatly. Democratic values have confirmed their relevance and are shared by the majority of nations.

But, at the same time, it would be too premature to think that all the difficulties are behind and a clear perspective of peaceful development is identifiable. Too many difficulties are still in existence, both leftovers of the Cold War and independent of it, and the chances of non-reversal in democratic development are still meager. If, for example, to take Russia, there was a strong possibility that in the course of recent Presidential election a Communist could have been elected what would have immediately put an end to all perspectives of democracy in the country. More than that, it is not only possible to expect a Communist comeback in Russia, but also to foresee an evolution of the current quasi-democratic system into an authoritarian, bureaucratic regime with strong nationalistic

policies.

So, the perspectives of democracy in Russia are still far from being sure. This issue has been actively probed in international literature. Starting with F. Fukuyama's article "End of History?" (1992) where the victory of "liberal democracy" was proclaimed once and for all due to democratic changes in the FSU, different other sources tried to study the possibilities of democratic changes in Russia. Among them, there was a visible group of those who openly challenged the capability of Russia to change: W. Clemens (1990), French writer J. Sapir (1996) and others. While, on the other hand, there were much more optimistic writings, both in US and elsewhere (see Yergin and Gustafson 1993).

Possibilities of a stable development in Europe and Asia-Pacific, at least in the areas neighboring Russia, are also far from being clear. Though economically Russia does not play a visible role in the global economy, its strategic weight and a possible effect from reversal of its domestic developments may play a significant role in the evolution of the status of those areas. From this point of view, analysis of the perspectives of democracy in Russia has all the grounds to be studied and discussed internationally as were the perspectives of democracy in America by Alexis de Tocquville (1954) in the 19th century for the perspectives of the world development.

To make that analysis more balanced and objective it will be useful to try to evaluate the origins of democratic changes in the FSU as well as to look impartially into the current state of affairs in Russia prior to give a judgement on the perspectives of democracy in this country.

GENESIS OF DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA

The study of the beginnings of democratic development in the FSU in late 1980s, as the starting point of all major changes which the former Soviet nations have gone through in the last decade, reveals several intriguing points. Some of them are quite known, the others are still to be reported in full. But taken together they buttress the conventional wisdom on real happenings in the FSU and give a quite different aspect of the democratic changes.

To begin with, there has never been something like a strong democratic movement in the FSU like, for example Solidarity movement in Poland which has destroyed the Communist system. Since the days of Chairman Nikita Khrushchev that lasted during late 1950s and early 1960s, there were some dissident elements within the Soviet Communist Party who wanted to

erase completely the residues of Stalinist legacy in the Communist Party's theory and practice (Crankshaw 1970). But after 1964 coup which ousted Khrushchev from power, almost all the dissident elements were thrown out from the Party and have formed a loose opposition outside it (Arbatov 1993). There were publications, underground at home and public abroad, which were criticizing the Communist regime from a pro-democracy point of view. There were also some minuscule groups, like "Helsinki Watch", branches of "Amnesty International" which tried to consolidate resistance against the Communist rule. There were well-known figures, like Andrei Sakharov, who openly challenged the Communist system (Sakharov 1968).

But all these activities were far from being a massive popular movement and were easily controlled by the Communist Party and by the secret police. The public at large was either apolitical, indifferent to the questions of democratic changes or servile to the regime. One may identify something like a strong but non-organized pro-democracy movement only in the last days of the Communist rule, in 1990-1991 when a "Democratic Russia" has appeared. Within few months it has acquired multi-million audience in the FSU and has contributed strongly in supporting Boris Yeltsin's fight against the CPSU. But even that movement was rather short-lived and disintegrated within a year or two after the Soviet Union collapsed. So, pro-democracy changes in Russia were not a result of a popular pressure of a vast nationwide campaign, but a product of a certain policy from the top.

At the same time, it should be stressed that democratic changes in the FSU were not also a result of a successful economic development which in other conditions would have objectively carried with itself a necessity for political changes. Such cases have happened in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and some Latin American countries where rapid economic development and sound economic performance have brought a widespread understanding of the necessity for political changes in favor of democracy and open society. Some observers expect that this may happen in China where the ruling regime has unleashed a successful economic reform and has to face a growing "human rights" movement, originally crashed at Tienanmen square in 1989 but still alive and powerful.

In the Soviet case everything was on the contrary: it was considered and has become a conventional wisdom that the economic crisis under the Communist regime which to some extent was caused by the structural problems and economic failure of the Communist regime, what was already identified in late 1960s by A.Sakharov and never recognized by the authorities, could be overcome through political changes. In this regard political changes preceded relevant economic basis and were not backed

by adequate structural reform. Lengthy discussions among policy-makers and experts which occupied attention of the mass-media and public during Gorbachev's time have ended in nothing: there was no idea of where to go in economy once the political changes have been started; how to coordinate political and economic reform; and how to accumulate foreign experience in this area.

Though in the time of M.Gorbachev (1985-1991) there was a widespread belief that the government could work out and unleash a sound economic reform, this has never happened but gave grounds to different speculations about a principal possibility to move towards open economy based on the principle of private property. This assumption was later incorporated by early B.Yeltsin's government and has become a basis for economic change under Y. Gaidar (1993).

It should be specifically noted that, among the factors which have contributed to the decision of M.Gorbachev's Communist government to start democratic changes, there was a strong element of external influence. A visible economic and social performance of developed democracies coupled with their progress in the area of technological innovation which had a special significance for the Soviets because of its military importance, was regarded as an evidence of the necessity to follow some elements of the Western model. There was a naive hope that heavy borrowing of these elements of the Western model (freedom of information, free elections, new political parties) could be coupled with the Communist ideology (this was M.Gorbachev's vision) and that through accommodation with the West, end of the Cold War, and partial economic and political changes, the Soviet Union could go through a period of troubles and solve its urgent issues (Gorbachev 1989). Western model was thoroughly studied in the academic institutions, proposals on possible modifications of domestic and foreign policies were drafted, and even introduced into government's policy.

Debates about possibility to follow Western model and possible consequences of it have given birth to a deep split in the Soviet establishment, in the *nomenklatura* between conservatives and modernizers.

By the time of election of M. Gorbachev as Secretary General of the CPSU in April 1985 the positions of modernizers have become strong enough to put their man, M. Gorbachev, into power and to give him a possibility to start the process of changes. M.Gorbachev has displayed an enormous capacity of a Byzantine-style leader outmanoeuvring some of the staunchest conservatives and forging his own majority in the leading organs of the Party. Yet, his ideas were not going beyond strengthening the Communist

rule through liberalization of the regime, introduction of some elements of democracy and destruction of the Cold War relationship with the West, something like a "Socialism with a human face".

Under M. Gorbachev the Soviet Union has moved rapidly towards democratization what was regarded by conservatives as a real threat to their power. The August 1991 coup has driven a deep wedge between the two wings of the Communist *nomenklatura* and the victory of the modernizers led at that time by Boris Yeltsin, as a rival to Mr Gorbachev's message, has put an end to the rule of the Communist Party altogether.

So, in the final analysis one may justifiably state that democratization in Russia has come as: first, that a certain policy of the Communist leadership was not a result of a popular pressure; second, that it was regarded as an appropriate tool to deal with growing problems of economic inefficiency of the previous regime and as a method to modernize Communist rule; third, that the whole idea to use democratic methods was borrowed from alien model which has proved its effectiveness in other than Soviet conditions; and , forth, that it has produced a sharp power struggle between two wings in the ruling elite.

This does not mean that democratization in the FSU was false or half-hearted. In the first place, it was a genuine attempt to change the model and pattern of the Soviet regime which by the end of 1970s was already regarded by many Communist leaders as outmoded and obsolete. But, because of this specific mixture of Communist goals and Western methods, it was carried out in a very specific way and was regarded by a vast majority of the population as another "twist" in the policies of authorities.

In the 20th century, the Russian population has become accustomed to different ideological and political "twists" from above which were undertaken not through a careful study of the needs of the nation, through some free discussions and debates in the society, but through changing conditions and power struggle: collectivization in late 1920s and early 1930s, purges of 1930s, de-Stalinization by Chairman Khrushchev, "perestroika" by M.Gorbachev and the like. All these "twists" were never coordinated with real needs of population, they resulted from power struggle at the top and largely left the population uninterested.

This was not something alien for a long-term historical tradition in Russia if to remember, for instance, forceful westernization of Russia under Peter the Great in early 18th century. One of the most important elements in historic development of Russia, beginning with 15th-16th centuries was absence of the beginnings of a civil society, as it was emerging in the Western part of Europe, and domination of totalitarian model under which

the direction and the path of development of the whole nation was decided at the top and then imposed on the society. In this sense, rapid democratization of the Soviet Union in late 1980's was largely a typical pattern of modernization "à la Russe".

The changes were never a product of a domestic debate, of a struggle between political parties, business groups, intellectuals. They were not a result of a mass pressure and demands for a change. Basically they were a result of a cold-blooded analysis at the top, decisions of a narrow group of top rulers, and acquired a form of a new government's policy carried out by bureaucracy. After such a policy was started, different segments of society would respond to it in a specific and particular way which explains much of the current realities in Russia. The society where all the main ideas of development were born at the top and then imposed as a certain governmental policy, simply lacked traditions and capabilities to participate in the process of changes. And even when democratic changes were proclaimed, giving a possibility of more liberty and individual entrepreneurship, this has mobilized only narrow strata of population.

PERFORMANCE OF DEMOCRACY

To understand better performance of democratic development in Russia within last few years, two questions have to be considered: what was and is the understanding of the essence and purpose of democratic changes at the top, on governmental level; second, what was and is the attitude towards democracy and its elements in the society at large, among its different groups and classes. From the very beginning of the changes in the FSU there were some very important differences in these attitudes which, to some extent, can give a good explanation of difficulties and troubles which Russia experiences now. Besides, these differences have a direct impact on politics and situation in different parts of Russia, where one may find so-called "red zones" (Communist controlled), zones of ethnic tension directly related to democratic changes, areas of retarded development, as well as huge urban centers which already live according to Western styles and standards. Geography in this sense also plays an important role in shaping the way of how democratic development is perceived in Russian society.

As to the position of the Russian ruling class on democracy, several things should be mentioned. First of all, since the whole idea of democratic development in Russia has come from the top, from that part of the elite which regarded democracy both as a way to deal with the systemic crisis of the Soviet Union and as a means of strengthening their power, it was clear

that a significant amount of the Soviet and, then, Russian ruling class wanted democratic changes. Analysis of existing information on this subject gives an evidence that there were some people in the Communist Party leadership advocating democratic changes both under the influence of Western model and as a result of the understanding that the majority of Soviet failures in agriculture and economic efficiency were directly connected to dictatorial rule of the Party. Among such people, Alexander Yakovlev (1995) may be mentioned. For these people democratic changes were a value in itself and their position was not associated directly with their personal business or financial considerations.

But these people did not constitute the majority among the modernizers. The majority of modernizers have supported M. Gorbachev and his reforms due to other considerations. Many of them, after years of being in the leadership, have become accustomed to the thought that their political power had to be coupled with large property. The fate of the high-positioned Soviet-style bureaucrats did not satisfy any more their political and personal aspirations. A possible resignation or retirement very often meant a total loss of power and authority. This has happened to Nikita Khrushchev, Piotr Shelest, Dmitri Polianski, and many other high-positioned Communists who, after their resignation have ended their days poor and powerless (Crankshaw 1970).

Years of stable existence under Brezhnev (1964-1982) have helped to consolidate the Soviet ruling class and to identify its political and economic interests. To many of the members of this class their positions and areas of responsibility in the government seemed as their personal property, as their fiefs. It was among these functionaries that the ideas of private property have become extremely popular; many of them believed that if they could privatise sectors of economy which they actually controlled that could lead to a higher economic performance and to the alliance between political power and large monopolistic property. But they understood that, in order to make the dreams of private property possible, the dictatorship of the Communist ideology had to be abandoned. The desire to put an end to the ideological control has led to a strong anti-Communist feeling widespread even among the Communist apparatchiks.

In the area of the anti-ideological struggle, modernizers have received strong support from the intellectual community: academics, creative artists, show business, writers, and mass media. These were the professionals which suffered mostly in the days of the Communist regime from the *diktat* of the ideology. Ideological prescriptions in research, literature, performances, film-making, journalism and were excessive. Ideology

controlled teaching in schools and universities, sports, public education, in one word, all spheres of human spiritual activities. It has also deeply penetrated economic planning, foreign-policy making, military training and planning. So, vast sections of people engaged in all these activities and tired from a tight ideological control were ready to support anyone who would start anti-ideological campaign. Curiously enough, it has officially started in the area of foreign policy when the then Soviet Foreign Minister E. Shevardnadze has launched the idea of "de-ideologization" of international relations. Very rapidly this "de-ideologization" has spread to almost all walks of life. More than that, it has given birth to a strong anti-communistic sentiment which has become a standard of a part of modernizers (B.Yeltsin) opposed to M. Gorbachev.

Together with anti-communism, a nationalistic feeling has appeared. Originally, it had very little to do with mass movements. It was a political tool of republican elite's in former Soviet republics who felt that they could use an opportunity in order to "privatize" their own republics through achieving independence and becoming leaders of sovereign nations without Moscow's control. Once declared, ideas of independence have become tremendously popular among population of all the republics, including Russia. Primary motive for such widespread feelings was also anti-Communist: for many people in the republics, especially in the Baltic states, the idea of independence was tightly connected to the idea of liberation from Communist dictatorship. This connection has produced such a strong impact that even Russia has declared its sovereignty (and independence from the Communist rule) in June, 1991.

If to conclude this part of the analysis, it can be understood that for a brief period in the late Soviet history, there was a striking coincidence of views and political positions of several influential groups: of a large section of the Party apparatchiks who were interested in using their power positions in order to change the social format of their status and to turn into a new class of private owners of the best parts of the Soviet economy, first of all related to natural resources; of large sections of intellectuals and professionals who wanted to end their ideological dependence from the regime, and a significant part of the population who aspired to have a better life once the Communist regime was gone. The coincidence of the interests of these large parts of population, though their final goals were totally different, has created a public atmosphere in which the fate of Communism was easily foreseen: a complete failure. Besides, this has also helped to change, in the process of reforms, their essence and ultimate goals. When M.Gorbachev has started the changes, his goal was to save the "Socialist choice", as he

called the Communist rule, but in the process of the changes the positions of those who wanted to end Communism in the FSU have become much stronger.

This may explain why the political result of the failure of the coup by the Communist hardliners in August 1991 were so fruitful for B.Yeltsin (who at that time was elected as President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic [RSFSR] in June 1991) and so disastrous for M.Gorbachev who actually was elected Soviet President but continued to hold position of the Secretary General of the Communist Party. Failure of the coup was at the same time failure of the Party, and together with the loss of power of the Communists M.Gorbachev has also lost his power. B. Yeltsin, together with his Ukrainian and Bielorrussian counterparts, has very easily formed a secret coalition which, in order to put an end to the rule of M.Gorbachev (who continued his functions in the Communist Party what was a complete disaster for his career) and signed an agreement in December 1991 which has unilaterally, and unconstitutionally, ended the Soviet Union. Thus, the power struggle between the all-Union and republican elites in the guise and framework of democratic changes has led to what some observers have called "Russian democratic revolution" (Abramov and Golovina 1996).

As to the popular reaction to these changes, it is understandable that ideas of democracy were differently received by different groups of population. For some, like the intelligentsia (professionals) they were something more or less familiar through literature, press reports, foreign movies. These people hoped that democratic changes will make their life less controlled by the authorities, more oriented towards respect of human rights. Rather naively, many among these people expected not simply a positive response but also assistance and understanding from the West. It was this large and rather loose group in Russia which was mainly pro-Western and hoped that the end of Communism will bring them freedom of information, travel, choice, and most of all, prosperity.

For the others, like peasants or low-qualified labour, the ideas of democracy sounded strange and even hostile since for many years they were subjected to strong Communist propaganda which declared democracy a "tool of capitalists" and had no chance to listen to alternative views. But, at the same time, ideas of democracy were largely accepted by many in Russia as full and unlimited freedom, almost anarchy, freedom from obligations and duties of citizens. This could be seen at least in two cases—rapid growth of small-scale street crime and desertion from military service. In other cases it was displayed in rapid emergence of such peculiar matters as anarchism, leftist and rightist radicalism, self-proclaimed

societies of aristocracy, revival of Cossak troops and the like. In all, the populist understanding of democracy has led to a serious weakening of state organisation and mechanisms, destruction of civil and moral authorities, growth of corruption and abuse of individual rights and freedom.

So, among real problems revealed by advancement of democracy in Russia, there were psychological as well as educational and cultural differences between different groups of population, government, and business communities in their attitudes and expectations. Those who were in power and managed to stick to it even after the collapse of Communism expected much more freedom in their business activities, including a significant portion of illegal deals in order to raise fortunes and acquire funds necessary for privatization. This line has led to increase of the importance of different criminal groups which obtained money through drug and weapons trafficking, control over prostitution, car-thefts, illegal export of precious metals and many other items left unattended after the Communist government was gone. At the same time, there appeared a new class of Russian businessmen, not related to the old nomenklatura and has quickly moved into politics and economics.

At the lower level, millions of those who have supported B.Yeltsin in 1991 were left practically ignored by the authorities and could not switch over to new life-styles and activities. They have perceived upcoming democracy rather negatively because, comparing to the Soviet times, it has left them without any support from the government, subject to increased exploitation, incapable of finding their status in the new conditions.

CURRENT POLICIES AND STATE OF AFFAIRS

To give an analytical picture of the current realities of democracy in Russia, several things have to be highlighted. First of all, the attempts to go further with democratisation, genuine or propagandistic, were cut short by the lack of a sound economic basis. This is not simply a lack of economic progress and rapid destruction of living standards of the population at large, but also a certain government's policy which makes impossible any significant savings, emergence of medium and small business, creation of a normal, regular market. The way in which privatization was carried out has helped only for big economic entities to emerge and become monopolists in the Russian market. What is typical for Russia today is existence of a monopolist-type economy with domination of government-related big economic structures which combine both political power and economic

control over large sectors of economy.

These structures see their interest not in attracting foreign investment or share their properties and dividends with small share-holders. They want the Russian economy as such for themselves only—that is why there is a strong resistance on the part of Russian bankers to let foreign banks operate in the country, the interest of the Russian car producers to keep high import dues on imported cars, of the Russian “agrarian lobby” to keep high dues on imported food, etc. Under the populist slogan “to defend Russian producer” these monopolistic structures simply consolidate their own control over Russian economy which they suck through monopolistically installed high prices (to the extent that, e.g., domestic prices on oil products and energy are higher than abroad). So, the conclusion is only one; while there are promises on the part of the government and expectations in the society that the process of democratisation will go on, the real economic basis which has been created through the process of privatisation provides all the grounds for an oligarchistic dictatorship.

The same may be said on some aspects of political life. There were big expectations of the rise of multi-party system in Russia. Many observers and analysts were precipitating that further emergence of democracy in the country will inevitably lead to creation of several major political parties. And this has not happened. If to look back at the presidential election in the summer of 1996, it becomes clear that there were only two big “parties” or contestants; the party of the government and the Communists. All the rest were small unimportant groups and clubs which practically have little impact on the society and public policy. The largest among them, the “Yabloko” group headed by G. Yavlinski, can hardly be described as a party. It is a loose election block and it has a very unclear political identity—social-democratic, liberal, populist, in one word, non-Communist opposition to the government from the right. Under the condition that there are no identifiable political parties, other than the two major blocks, pro-government and Communists, the real choice for a Russian voter has also become rather limited—either to address to the “glory of the past” (which was already rejected by the majority in 1991) and support Communists or to address to the present state of affairs which has also become intolerable. The choice is very narrow, but there was no alternative.

After the armed showdown between the President and the Supreme Soviet in 1993, the new political and government structure in Russia has become unbalanced. Instead of a carefully designed structure of checks and balances which would distribute equally power functions among legislative, executive, and legal branches of power, B. Yeltsin’s Constitution

of December 1993 concentrates enormous power in the hands of the executive branch, the President. The parliament, the *Duma*, is particularly powerless. It has almost no control over the government, its abilities to control the President are non-existent, practically this is simply a talking forum without a significant impact on the politics. Judicial branch is simply not worth mentioning. So, concentration of power in the hands of the President and his staff creates a visibility of a centralised leadership but in reality very often the President remains a hostage of his own environment and makes the decision—making process both in politics and economics a closed, non-transparent action depending upon the “games of apparat” and not on a national consensus. As a result, many of the President’s decisions are either unacceptable, or incomprehensible, or simply unknown to the population and almost all of them do not work. Besides, very often they are taken in the interests of small influential business or political groups and have no chances of being followed by those who do not regard them as fitting their interests.

To make the government system work in these conditions the President has to rely upon vast bureaucratic system—not the press, not the *Duma*, not the political parties, not the population. This leads to enormous growth of the bureaucracy in Russia, which by some estimates has already exceeded numerically the Soviet bureaucracy (Thomas 1995). Being practically uncontrolled (there are some controlling agencies in the President’s administration, but they cannot physically carry the burden of keeping the huge bureaucratic system under surveillance), the bureaucracy very often follows its own interests and not the interests of the society or the directives of the President. This turns almost every area of government’s policy into a mess with few chances of any meaningful result. This may be demonstrated by the way in which the war in Chechnya was conducted or, for example, the issue of balancing the budget, or the situation with such critical areas as crime-control, housing, health, environment, etc. The conclusions that in reality Russia is now controlled not by the Constitution, not by the President, not by the *Duma*, but by bureaucracy does not seem exaggeration. And uncontrolled bureaucracy is the worst enemy of democracy.

Besides, Russian bureaucracy has always been and is divided into two main groups, the central bureaucracy, which serves the central, federal government in Moscow, and the provincial bureaucracy, the one which serves the regional governments. The gist of the problem here is not, of course, in geography. It is again around the issues of property that the differences between these two groups are concentrated. The so-called “Moscow bureaucracy” (and Prime Minister V. Chernomyrdin is the

champion of this group) wants to use its power in order to preside over the process of privatization; to take control over the best parts of the former Soviet property under the guise of "federal property" and to leave the local bureaucracy only with the residues. While local governments try to reverse the situation and to hold control almost over everything which is located on their territories. One of the best examples of this controversy is the conflict between Moscow and Yakutian government over control of the rich gold and diamond mines in that remote Siberian land.

This adds significantly to one of typical Russian problems (because of its vast spaces) which has always been relationship between the center, Moscow, and the periphery, the provinces or the regions. Though some of these provinces are in effect national autonomies which gives a certain flavour to the issue of relations between the center and the periphery, still there are some common problems for this kind of relations, disregarding whether they are Russian-populated or non-Russian areas. And the main issue is of course that of economic development and distribution of income and resources. There are poor provinces of the central, historical Russia which were traditionally oriented to agricultural production and which now experience severe crisis. There are rich provinces in Siberia (Tyumen with its oil, Yakutia with its gold and diamonds) which can survive successfully without "leading role" of the center. But the role of the center in Russian conditions traditionally consisted in redistribution of income: it taxed every province and took the lion's share for its own consumption (bureaucracy, armed forces, police, education, science and research, etc.) while squeezing out some sources for the development of the poorer parts of the nation. This was presented as a policy of "equalisation of the level of development" of the whole country.

In reality, the issue of distribution of powers and authority including distribution of income and taxes has created a big problem for Russia. B. Yeltsin's demagoguery appeal to the national autonomy in 1991; "take as much sovereignty as possible" was accepted by some as a possibility to become almost completely independent from Moscow. Hence, the cases of Tatarstan and Chechnya threatened integrity of the Russian territory. While it appeared possible to solve the issue of Tatarstan peacefully through negotiation, in the case of Chechnya Moscow had decided to use force, which has led to a national crisis. Those who have not taken the bait of "sovereignty" still have big problems with Moscow. In the long run an attempt to keep loyalty of the local elites through subsidizing their economies has created problems in Moscow's relations with Russian-populated areas (the Urals, Far-eastern Maritime province) which considered their status as

being lower than that of the non Russian-populated areas.

This aspect of Russian politics develops along with another which has direct impact to democratic changes. As one of the most important results of B. Yeltsin's policy, the problem of social protection of the population has emerged. In the process of economic transition towards market economy the vast system of social security developed in the FSU and which existed for several decades has become virtually destroyed; free medical assistance, free education, government-sponsored health resort system, free kindergartens, and many other elements. Part of them have become payable, the others practically disappeared. The worst blow was dealt to the older generation, the retired people. The general decay of living standards because of inflation and unchecked price-rises which has driven between 30-40 percent of the population to the edge of virtual poverty, has hit the retired people most than anyone else. The actual size of their pensions has shrunk twice or three times comparing with the Soviet times, the government very often was not paying pensions for months, medical assistance has become costly. Practically around half of the population felt their life has become much worse than before 1991. All that has contributed to the rise of the labour unrest, the highest in the coal-mine areas.

If to draw a brief conclusion to this part of analysis of the current state of affairs in Russia the following conclusion may be made. Russia is definitely moving toward full-size democracy but in a rather peculiar way and with the pace which may threaten to democratic perspectives at all.

First, the current political system in Russia, though it is based on free elections, in reality represents a type of highly "centralised democracy" (in contrast to Soviet-style "democratic centralism") with excessively developed executive branch practically uncontrollable by legislative or judicial branches. This leads to exaggerated role of bureaucracy instead of democratically elected organs of power and makes the whole decision-making process in the country independent from popular control. Second, Russia experiences rapid growth of new ruling class, basically originated from the old *nomenklatura* with some insignificant elements of "new Russians." The new ruling class bases its power on the combination of political power and big property legally or illegally privatised from what was preliminary "people's property." Third, the manner, in which this new ruling class has emerged and established its control over society has contributed to the growth of economic crimes which, when coupled with widespread corruption and other abuses of power, creates a specific climate in the country.

PERSPECTIVES FOR DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA

A good question after the analysis of the current state of affairs in Russia is, whether there are perspectives for democracy in that country? And if there are any, what are they? This, again is something to discuss internationally because Russian democracy has already become one of the important part of global equilibrium and cannot be ignored by any responsible nation in its planning for the future.

Generally speaking, perspectives of democracy in Russia are a function of balance between pros and cons which were already analysed. Definitely, there is a set of factors working in favour of future democracy in Russia. Among them strong anti-Communist feeling of the majority based on total disappointment with Communism; belief that there is no other model which Russia may embark; that liberal democracy, because of its evident success in America, Europe and Asia, is the best way for Russia. Strong foreign influence which is backed by significant contributions of WB and IMF to the Russian financial system is another factor coupled with steadily growing foreign investment which has started to play a visible role in Russian industrial production. Another plus is strong attachment of the Russian liberal *intelligentsia* to democratic ideals. Taking together, all these factors contribute to consolidation of pro-democracy forces in the country and may bring a new level of democracy after the next presidential election in the year 2000. As to the current government, one can hardly expect further democratisation in its policy, if any at all, but definitely there will be no reversal to the past.

At the same time, there is a tangible perspective of a possible anti-democratic scenario. Even if the Communists never get to power constitutionally, still the current regime may gradually slide towards a form of authoritarian, oligarchic rule with significantly reduced human and public freedom; without free press and media, with no opposition parties, with controlled quasi-election, following the strong disillusionment among significant parts of population over today's results of democracy and market reform. Existence of a strong economic monopoly and the government-related industries and the desire to maintain that monopoly through political, non-economic means; the existence of huge bureaucracy which is powerful enough to block any further movement towards democracy may also play a role in non-democratic, authoritarian evolution of Russia. Inability of the current regime to work out democratic means to solve current crises, like war in Chechnya, and its trend towards use of non-

democratic, coercive means and methods; lack of traditions of democracy in the country and the necessity to use violent, brutal means to fight crime are also parts of a possible non-democratic future.

So, there is a delicate balance of pro- and anti-democracy trends in the current Russian society, and hardly anyone can give a definite forecast whether democracy will survive in Russia. If to add to it possible impact of external events, for example, decision to expand NATO, there are legitimate grounds for a certain scepticism about democratic perspectives in Russia. Speaking of a possibility of NATO expansion to the Russian borders, it is easy to foresee further events; growth of national security concerns, necessity to reciprocate with increased military preparations, increase in military spending, growth of the role of the military in Russian politics, confusion of the partisans of the relations with the West (who are the strongest supporters of democracy) and, as a result, evolution of Russia towards something like a military regime. In the current situation any major event may produce such a controversial impact on the perspectives of Russian democracy and smash its chances overnight.

Even if Russia goes through all these external and internal crises safely, still the unsolved issues of economic development will continue to produce a major threat to democratic perspectives. It is hard to imagine that the population with that low income as the Russian population has, may be a good recipient of the ideals which can flourish only in the conditions of affluence—freedom of speech, travel, political association. Poor population will never produce a good consumption market and with absence of such a market the government will be the largest and the most important spender and buyer of the industrial and agricultural output in the national economy. And if so, then there will be no need to develop human consumption which is inalienable from human rights and freedom.

After initial drive of Russia towards democracy, as a result of the downfall of the Communist regime, democracy in Russia has run into severe tests. Now, it will be the result of the ability of the Russian democrats and their foreign friends to find appropriable means to go safely through these tests and not to loose a chance to turn Russia into a full-scale democratic nation.

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VICTOR A. KREMENYUK is Professor-Doctor, Deputy Director of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies, in Moscow, Russia. He is one of leading Russian scholars in Political Science and consultant to the Russian government on political affairs. This contribution is prepared on the basis of a paper presented at the joint Russian-Korean conference on "Current Political Issues and Prospects for Cooperation between South Korea and Russia" organized in Moscow in August, 1996 by the Institute of Social Development and Policy Research, Seoul National University, and the Institute of USA and Canada Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.