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Prospects for the Russian Democratic Reformers

An Intelligence Assessment

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Directorate of Intelligence

Prospects for the Russian Democratic Reformers

An Intelligence Assessment

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Prospects for the Russian Democratic Reformers

Key Judgments

Information available as of 8 April 1991 was used in this report.

The passage by the special session of the Russian Congress of Boris Yel'tsin's proposal early this month to create a popularly elected Russian presidency and hold an election in June was a watershed event for reformers in Russia and the union. Yel'tsin's immediate task is to get the Supreme Soviet to draft an amendment that gives him a strong presidency and then to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority when the Congress reconvenes in late May. Yel'tsin's victory in creating a directly elected presidency will also bolster support for a new parliamentary election that would probably result in a more reformist Congress.

If Yel'tsin wins the presidency—which is likely at this point—his battle with Gorbachev and the center will probably intensify. He will undoubtedly use his new position to push even more assertively for radical economic reform and Russian sovereignty. The center will most likely step up its campaign to discredit him and will try to block him in the Russian legislature, but its main surrogate, the Russian Communist Party, is splintering and lacks voting discipline. In the absence of violence or other use of force, however, the center is unlikely to vanquish Yel'tsin or stop the Russian legislature from becoming more representative of the republic's populace.

The outcome of this struggle will depend largely on the success the democratic reformers in Russia have had so far in changing the politics of the republic. In the spring of 1990 reformers succeeded in electing a sizable bloc of deputies to the Russian Congress of People's Deputies and to local councils, posing a more democratic alternative to President Gorbachev's regime and challenging the hold of the Communist Party. In December the Congress succeeded in amending over one-fifth of the Russian Constitution, shifting it in a sharply liberal direction. The amendments assert republic sovereignty, lay the groundwork for economic reform, and liberalize civil rights. The legislature also passed bills that challenge the center's authority over military service, rights to natural resources on Russian territory, and the union budget. Traditionalists, however, have succeeded in blocking key reform legislation and weakening other reformist initiatives, including a highly controversial landownership law. Reformers have also been blocked by the center's hold on monetary and fiscal policy and the power of the party bureaucracy.

Democratic reformers at the helm of city councils have not been as effective as the republic legislature at moving reform forward. The powers of the local councils are not clearly delineated, and reformers are locked in a complicated political battle with oblast-level organizations—dominated by the Communist Party—to exert control. Reformists at the local levels are beginning to be blamed for the continuing downturns in the local economies

The ability of the Russian democratic movement to move beyond a cluster of individual leaders to create parties with a mass political base will ultimately determine the pace of reform in the republic and in the USSR as a whole. Many of Russia's democratically oriented movements have in the past few months formed fairly cohesive parties, coalesced in blocs, held congresses, and published action programs. Over 20 democratic parties and organizations—including the largest three parties—have coalesced into a major umbrella movement, Democratic Russia, whose members act as reformist voting blocs within local councils as well as in the republic legislature. The movement has articulated an openly anti-Communist platform. The center's use of force in the Baltic republics appears to have emboldened the democratic parties and provided the impetus for them to submerge ideological and tactical differences, at least for the short term. Democratic Russia took the lead in organizing pro-Yel'tsin demonstrations to counter the anti-Yel'tsin campaign orchestrated by the traditionalists after his call for Gorbachev's resignation. The large democratic-sponsored demonstrations throughout Russia before the 17 March referendum also were urging the public to vote "yes" for the popularly elected republic presidency.

The parties, however, face an uphill battle to overcome limited popular identification with parties and voter apathy that has grown as the euphoria surrounding elections in the spring of 1990 has worn off and economic conditions have continued to worsen. Most of the new parties still lack a republicwide organizational structure, and all have only sporadic republic-level media access. Personal antagonisms among party leaders, differing views on how to attract new members, and disagreements over how far and how fast to push reforms have stunted the parties' ability to transform themselves into viable alternatives to the CPSU

Russia's democratic reformers are likely to face challenges from both an increasingly frustrated public and a more hostile and aggressive center in the coming months:

- Reformers in power will face increasing public criticism as economic conditions deteriorate.
- The center will probably intensify efforts designed to co-opt, divide, and discredit the new political parties and reformers in power.
- National and local traditionalist media will intensify efforts to misrepresent reformist positions, blame reformers for shortages and increases in crime, accuse them of economic sabotage, and portray local councils dominated by reformers as inept.

While prospects for reform at the republic level are cautiously positive—especially since reformers won the 17 March republic referendum calling for the creation of a directly elected republic presidency—local-level reformers have less power to battle the system effectively. To overcome the present obstacles and move reform forward, reformers in power and the emerging political parties face some formidable tasks. Their progress can be measured on three primary fronts:

- Their ability to overcome voter apathy and garner public support by developing programs that address the basic concerns of the populace—food distribution, unemployment, safety of pensions, and social security for the poorest.

- Their progress in institutionalizing reform through restructuring government institutions, further liberalizing the republic constitution, passing laws that implement a market economy and democratic principles, giving local elected governments more power over revenues, allocating essential services, and restructuring city councils to overcome local government gridlock.

- Their ability to effectively counter the campaign by the CPSU and the center to discredit them and place obstacles in the way of reform legislation.

Both reformers in power and the democratic parties face serious obstacles and even dangers as a result of the central government's turn toward more authoritarian policies. Yel'tsin's victory at the Congress in early April, however, will facilitate the reformers' unity and persistence. The legislature's ability to continue to push through reform measures across the republic will be put to the test during the next Congress, scheduled to begin on 21 May.

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Prospects for the Russian Democratic Reformers

Reformers at the Helm

Progress to Date

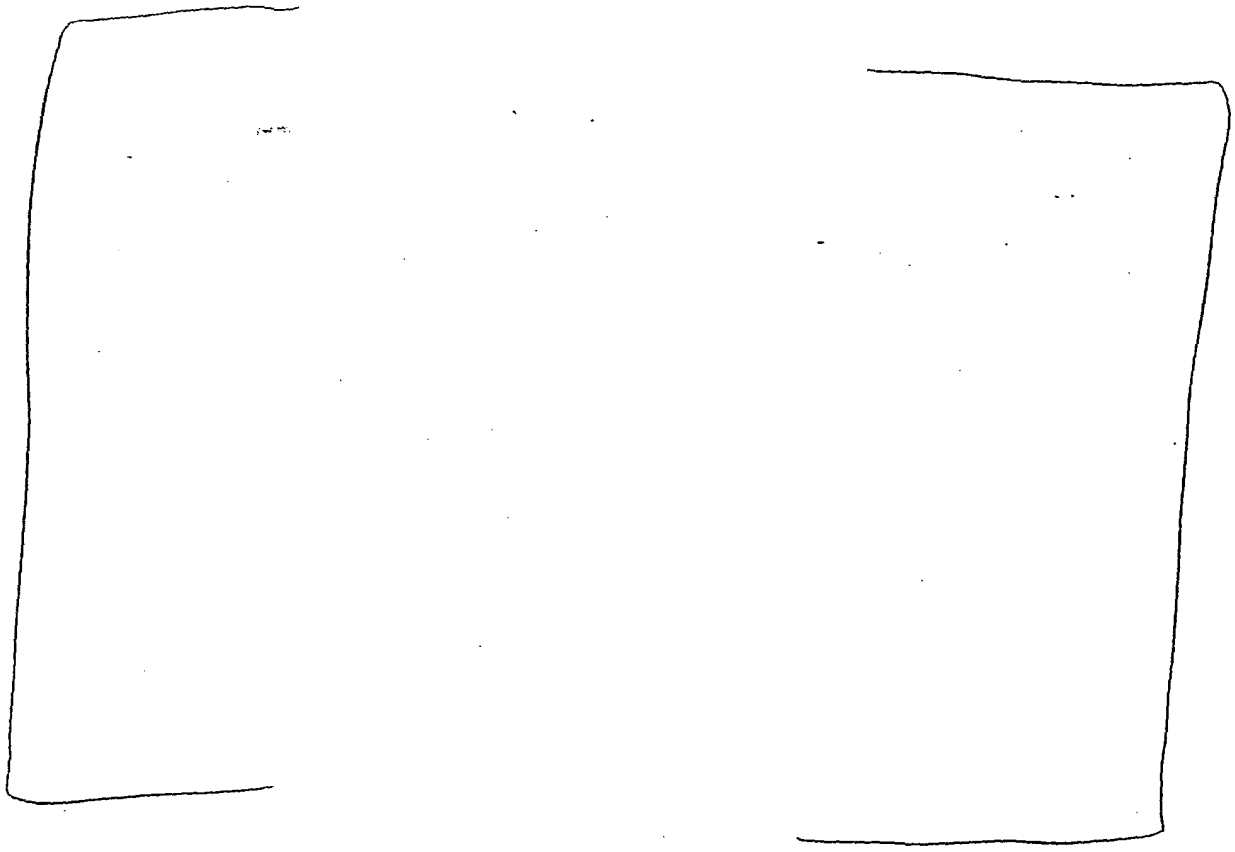
The fate of reform in Russia lies with those democratic reformers who were elected to the Russian legislature and local city councils in the spring of 1990. Their ability to formulate and implement effective programs for reform will be the primary ingredient shaping prospects for democratic change. Key reformers at the republic's helm include Russian Supreme Soviet Chairman Yel'tsin, Prime Minister Silayev, and Supreme Soviet Deputy Chairman Khasbulatov, as well as prominent local leaders such as Moscow Mayor Popov, Deputy Mayor Stankevich, and Leningrad Mayor Sobchak. Their goals are to revise the Russian Constitution along democratic lines, pass legislation that would move the republic toward a market economy and more autonomy from the center, and transform the republic and local executive, legislature, and judiciary bodies, using Western experience as their model.

Vying for Power in the Russian Legislature

Russian reformers have avoided the fate of their union-level counterparts, who have been demoralized and scattered by Gorbachev's turn to hardliners for support. The most important factor in their favor has been Yel'tsin, who has generated a comprehensive reform program, selected a supportive cabinet, and maneuvered skillfully in the republic legislature through negotiation, compromise, and the linking of reform to the republic sovereignty issue. His sensitivity to factional differences within the legislature and willingness to compromise on some controversial issues have allowed him to garner enough support to pass important reform legislation. Democratic reformers constitute roughly 30 percent of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies and a slightly smaller percentage of the Supreme Soviet. Despite frequent disruptions and challenges by traditionalist deputies during the Congress in December, Yel'tsin, with support from centrist deputies, succeeded in amending over one-fifth of the Russian Constitution, shifting it in a sharply liberal direction. The legislature approved amendments that assert republic sovereignty, lay the groundwork for economic reform, and liberalize civil rights. The legislature has also approved bills that challenge the center's authority over military service, rights to natural resources on Russian territory, and the union budget.

Although reformers in the Russian legislature have shown surprising strength, they still face a significant challenge from traditionalists. Deputies from the Communists of Russia bloc—claiming approximately 40 percent of the Congress—have succeeded in impeding some key legislation and in watering down other reformist initiatives. Yel'tsin's candidate for the post of Supreme Soviet deputy chairman was rejected by the Congress in June 1990 and again in December. Traditionalists also weakened key reform initiatives, including a landownership law. Yel'tsin was challenged at the Supreme Soviet session in January when his attempt to craft a strong Russian response to the crackdown in the Baltic republics was narrowly defeated three times, primarily because of absenteeism and traditionalist opposition. Although Yel'tsin was supported by an overwhelming majority of the deputies present, the inability of reformers to pass an immediate response weakened their credibility and tarnished the Russian Supreme Soviet's public image as a decisive, reform-minded body.

Reformers regained the momentum toward the end of the special Congress in early April. Deputies approved—by a margin of 607 to 228, with 100 abstentions—Yel'tsin's call for temporarily expanding his powers and transferring some powers from the Congress to the Supreme Soviet to deal with the crisis situation in the republic. Deputies also approved his proposal to task the Supreme Soviet to draft a law on



the executive presidency, reconvene the Congress to ratify the amendment on 21 May, and to hold a presidential election on 12 June. The vote was a major step forward for Yel'tsin, whose strong core of reformers was joined by moderate deputies who had opposed putting the presidency issue on the agenda earlier in the session. The moderate deputies—who have voted with Democratic Russia in the past on some reform issues but have been wary of Yel'tsin's motives—were apparently swayed by the need for decisive action and reassured by the limited nature of his plan.

Traditionalists also found themselves in disarray at the Congress. Although the Congress was ostensibly called to consider Yel'tsin's ouster, his opponents were forced to concede that they did not have the numerical support to call for a no-confidence vote against him. The hardline Communists of Russia bloc did not come prepared with an alternative program for dealing with the economic crisis, spent most of its efforts attacking Yel'tsin, and was racked by growing disillusionment in its ranks. Furthermore, they suffered a severe blow when Col. Aleksandr Rutskoy, a member of the Russian Supreme Soviet Presidium and Russian Communist Party Central Committee, announced the formation of an alternate "Communists for Democracy" bloc and claimed that 179 Communists were already willing to join. In a formal break with the hardline leadership of the Russian Communist Party, Rutskoy's new bloc declared its support for Yel'tsin and many of his programs.

Local Reformers Under Fire

Democratic reformers at the helm of city councils have not been as effective as the republic legislature at moving reform forward. The powers of the local councils are not clearly delineated, and reformers are locked in a complicated political battle with oblast-level organizations to exert control. Although reformers constitute a majority in some local councils, they do not have the executive power necessary to implement reforms in many administrative areas. Reformers have been stalled by their dependence on the pace of reform set by the central government and by the nearly intractable problems they inherited from the old regime. Reformist city councils are also dependent on oblast-level bodies that are still dominated by CPSU deputies. The oblast officials control many of the essential economic levers, such as the distribution of housing, jobs, and supplies to enterprises and access to revenue to finance projects.

Democratic reformers have also been criticized for taking "democracy" too literally by spending time giving long speeches and getting caught up in unimportant details. In Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Ryazan', and other cities where democratic reformers control the city councils, reformers and traditionalists are carrying out a media war in which they blame each other for shortages and increasing crime. Communist Party domination of the media in local areas puts reformers at a disadvantage and hinders their ability to present their case and build a support base.

Reformist leaders in Moscow and Leningrad have called for tougher measures from all levels of government to get through the current economic crisis. In late December, Mayor Sobchak called for a moratorium on the activities of all political parties for a year—including Communist Party committees—to concentrate on economic tasks. The city councils also seem to be trying to organize themselves more effectively and minimize infighting to retain the public's confidence. Their tougher rhetoric reflects not only a deteriorating situation but also a growing defensiveness in the face of mounting criticism from traditionalists. Low voter turnout for a municipal election in Leningrad in December—roughly 20 percent—attests to the growing disillusionment at the local level.

Reformers elected to city councils in outlying areas face even stiffer challenges from the party apparatus, security organs, and a party-controlled press. According to a *Literaturnaya gazeta* article, reformers have even been victims of violent attacks. In Kazan' the headquarters of Democratic Russia was destroyed, and in Saransk the local chairman of the movement was beaten.

Officials in Sverdlovsk claim that, although the reformist city council is the focus of growing complaints over empty store shelves, inflation, and crime, it does not have the power to implement reform. City officials claim that an "unelected elite" consisting of the Communist Party, security apparatus, the military-industrial complex, and the executive bureaucracy still holds most of the power. According to journalists who have visited the city, residents claim the council passes laws that are not implemented, and the public blames the democrats. Mayor Samarin—a reformist—claims that the democrats' current legitimacy crisis stems from the fact that the public expected too much from an inexperienced city government that had to contend with the Communist Party, which still has an entrenched presence in the city and provincial executive committees

An *Izvestiya* article on Ryazan' highlighted friction between the city council and oblast party committees and their attempts to blame each other for bread shortages. The article sided with the reformist city council, pointing out that the executive committee is dependent on the oblast committee and is therefore unable to carry out decisions made by the council. Ryazan' is taking the initiative to streamline the municipal system, pending the new Russian Republic legislation; it recently decided to abolish the city's executive committee and combine the posts of chairman of the city soviet and chairman of the executive committee. The council has been criticized heavily by the local Communist Party newspaper, which has not covered any of the recent restructuring.

Reformist Councils in Moscow and Leningrad

In Moscow reformers have made little progress to date in overcoming obstacles to their reformist goals. Mayor Popov has claimed that the size of the council—almost 500 deputies—is unwieldy and that the existing system of governing councils is flawed and must be changed before major progress can be made. Although reformers in the Moscow city council won a majority in elections held in the spring of 1990, at the oblast level the deputies are roughly evenly divided between the democratic reformers and traditionalists. Although Popov has a fairly good working relationship with Moscow City Executive Committee Chairman Yuriy Luzhkov, implementation of council orders can be difficult if conflicting orders come from the oblast-level leadership. In an attempt to break the cycle of inertia and inefficiency, Popov in January proposed a detailed and radical reorganization of the Moscow city government that would consolidate and strengthen executive power. In late February the Moscow council approved a set of principles it will champion as the basis for legislation on the status of Moscow that overlaps with Popov's proposal but rejects his concept of a strong mayor and weak city council. The council did pose to the public in the 17 March referendum the question of a directly elected mayor, which passed overwhelmingly

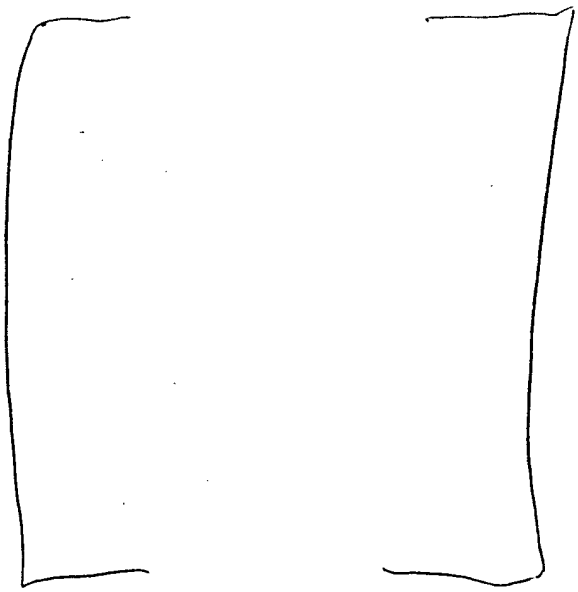
In Leningrad past leaders presided over the local party structure and a powerful military-industrial complex. In taking over the government, Mayor Sobchak acquired virtually no institutional power base; his prestige and authority flow directly from his public popularity. Sobchak also has a very strained relationship with the Executive Committee Chief Aleksandr Shchelkanov. He has been criticized locally by traditionalists and reformers within the city council for his travels abroad, his inability to follow through on reform proposals, and his preoccupation with national politics at the expense of local issues. As Leningrad's economic situation deteriorates, Sobchak's public support continues to decline. His recent tougher rhetoric may be an attempt to assert that he is taking resolute action to exert control and to deflect some criticism from traditionalists.

Sobchak has accused the city council of being a "do nothing" body, blaming radical reformers for torpedoing his proposals—including a plan to make Leningrad a free economic zone. The council has been unable to pass legislation dealing with many of the city's most crucial problems including the transportation system, transition to market prices, and privatization of housing, primarily because of splits within the council. Sobchak's efforts to work with Leningrad's big enterprises, his calls for restructuring the local soviet system, and his attempts to overcome the council's "debating club" reputation have met with opposition from reformist deputies who accuse him of trampling on democratic values and associating too closely with the center. His strong stance against the center's actions in the Baltic republics, however, may quiet some of his critics for the short term.

Developing a Democratic Infrastructure

The New Democratic Parties

The ability of the Russian democratic movement to move beyond a cluster of individual leaders to create parties with a mass political base will ultimately determine the pace of reform in the republic and in the USSR as a whole. Many of Russia's democratically oriented movements have in the past few months formed fairly cohesive parties, coalesced in blocs, held congresses, and published action programs. Three of the largest Russian democratic parties took a major step toward gaining legitimacy by registering with the Russian Justice Ministry in mid-March. The parties face an uphill battle to overcome limited popular identification with parties and voter apathy that has grown as the euphoria surrounding elections in the spring of 1990 has worn off and economic conditions have continued to worsen. The democratic parties, however, were galvanized into action by the 17 March



referendum and rallied enough public support to hold the largest prodemocracy, and pro-Yel'tsin, demonstrations to date on 10 March. Yel'tsin's endorsement of the need for a strong democratic party in his address to Democratic Russia on 9 March will also help the parties overcome public apathy. The democratic parties face the immediate task of organizing their supporters and sympathizers who have been elected to office, so they can affect current legislation. The parties' long-term—and possibly most important—role is preparing for new elections in order to stack the local councils and republic legislature with reformist deputies.

Three primary parties have emerged from the proliferation of new parties in the Russian Republic: the Democratic Party of Russia, the Republican Party of the Russian Federation—formerly the Democratic Platform faction that left the CPSU last spring—and the Social Democrats. The Democratic Party has proclaimed its goal as the "consolidation of all democratic forces on the basis of struggle for the constitutional ouster of the power of the CPSU apparatus at elections, in the congress, and in the supreme and local soviets." The Republican Party has called for the resignation of the central government, its replacement with an interrepublic committee, and the immediate direct election of the president of the USSR.

The stated goal of the Social Democrats is to transform the USSR into a parliamentary democracy and a free market economic system, while protecting society from the extreme dislocations of such a change.

The platforms of most of the democratic parties, including the largest three, represent a wide spectrum of positions on reform but support the following general positions:

- A free market economy and private ownership, although the Social Democrats advocate strong mechanisms to protect the poor during the transition period.
- The "deepening of democratic processes," including the direct election of the president of the USSR.
- The removal of the Communist Party apparatus from the armed forces, the KGB, and the Interior Ministry.
- Yel'tsin's view of a union based on voluntary participation of sovereign republics that cede limited rights to the central government.

Party membership remains relatively small. The Democratic Party claims 30,000 members, the Republicans 20,000, and the Social Democrats 8,000 to 10,000. None of these claims can be verified. Soviet polling data suggest that the public does not identify strongly with any particular party and may even be averse to the concept of formal parties because of the negative image of the CPSU

The new parties have been plagued by internal disputes over alleged antidemocratic practices and differences over internal procedure. Traditionalists have seized on the theme of antidemocratic practices in their press and have used it to discredit the parties. Some parties advocate a rigid structure and party discipline similar to that of the Communist Party in order to combat the influence of the CPSU. Current and former members of the Democratic Party of Russia have accused its leader, Nikolay Travkin, of conducting party business in an undemocratic manner, and others have characterized him as dictatorial and authoritarian.

Democratic Russia

More than 20 democratic parties and organizations—including the largest three parties—have coalesced into a major umbrella movement, Democratic Russia, whose members act as reformist voting blocs within local councils as well as in the republic legislature. The movement has articulated an openly anti-Communist platform since its formal creation in October 1990. Arkadiy Murashev, the chairman of its organizational committee, recently stated that the most important task of the movement is to promote the adoption of a new Russian Constitution that would put an end to the socialist period of Russian history and neutralize the "ruinous activity of the Communist imperial center." Democratic Russia's leaders include prominent members of the Interregional Deputies Group in the USSR legislature such as historian Yuriy Afanas'yev and Mayor Popov.

Democratic Russia's leadership is grappling with ways to expand its membership beyond intellectuals in the larger cities. It claimed in January to have 300,000 to 400,000 active members, and its local organizations publish approximately 500 newspapers in 40 cities across the republic. Although the movement has local affiliates throughout Russia, its support seems to be fairly shallow outside the major cities. Its anti-CPSU stance has enabled the movement to rally support for demonstrations, but its long-term viability as a democratic challenge to the CPSU will depend on its ability to appeal to broader public concerns. The traditionalist press has been playing on the public's fears of economic decline, portraying reformist policies as leading to the breakup of the union, massive unemployment, and increasing crime. Yuriy Afanas'yev recently told [redacted] that the traditionalists had succeeded in convincing the public that the CPSU was more concerned with stability and social security than were the reformers.

Democratic Russia is also trying to increase its strength by establishing links across republic borders. Most of its six cochairmen attended the founding in Kharkov in January of the Democratic Congress, a coalition of democratic parties and movements from 11 republics dedicated to opposing the CPSU's continued dominance. The organization's immediate goal was to develop a joint course of action in response to the center's policies in the Baltic region. Democratic Russia's role in the meeting, however, was weakened when the leader of the Russian Democratic Party withdrew his participation because the Congress voted to reject his view that individual rights should take precedence over support for republic sovereignty movements. This issue of individual rights versus republic sovereignty is likely to continue hindering interrepublic coalition building, driving wedges between reformers in Russia and those in the non-Slavic republics, as well as between Russian minorities and the predominant ethnic groups in the other republics.

Democratic Russia and other political parties have been handicapped by the continued refusal of popular politicians such as Yel'tsin, Popov, and Sobchak to join any political party. Without such leaders, the democratic parties have considerably less clout to rally popular support for demonstrations, strikes, or longer-term goals of electing reformist legislators. Popov has been active in the Democratic Russia movement, but has not joined a specific party.

Yel'tsin, however, has cooperated more closely with Democratic Russia in the past few months on issues that rally considerable public support. [redacted] Yel'tsin agreed to meet with Democratic Russia leaders to coordinate responses to the center's establishment of joint MVD/military patrols in major cities beginning 1 February. His endorsement of the need for a strong democratic party on 9 March will boost support for the democratic parties, but Yel'tsin is unlikely to formally join an established party since he does not want to narrow his support base and risk alienating moderates in the legislature. He will, however, cooperate more closely with the democratic movements in the future

Many of the new parties still lack the republicwide organizational structure and media access to combat effectively the stepped-up efforts by the Russian Communist Party and traditionalists at the center to discredit them. Personal antagonisms among party leaders, differing views on building party membership and party discipline, and disagreements over degrees of radicalism have stunted the parties' ability to transform themselves into viable alternatives to the CPSU. Soviet public opinion polls also indicate that, although a sizable part of the general populace supports democratic ideals and may be willing to vote for reformist candidates in local elections, much of the population is not eager to join formal political parties.

The center's use of force in the Baltic region, Yel'tsin's call for Gorbachev's resignation, and the 17 March referendum appear to have given new impetus to the radicalization and cooperation of parties within Democratic Russia and to the submersion of ideological and operational differences within the parties. Following the crackdown Democratic Russia immediately declared itself to be "in political opposition to the course being pursued by President Gorbachev and the USSR Government," and it organized mass demonstrations against the use of force in Lithuania. The crackdown also seemed to provide the catalyst for the Democratic Party to finally officially join the Democratic Russia movement. The strong reaction from reformers may have caused the center to refrain from escalating the crackdown. Democratic Russia took the lead in organizing massive pro-Yel'tsin demonstrations and in urging the public to vote "no" for the union question on the referendum and vote "yes" for creating a Russian presidency

The Center Fights Back

The center has taken a number of steps designed to co-opt, divide, and discredit the new political parties and reformers in power. Most significant has been a campaign in national and local traditionalist media that misrepresents reformers' positions, blames them for shortages and increases in crime, accuses them of economic sabotage, and portrays local councils dominated by reformers as inept. Under the new law on public associations, new parties must submit information on their aims, membership, structure, and the addresses of party leaders. The law gives the Justice Ministry the right to request all documents connected with the activities of the party and to attend their meetings. The Ministry also set up a special department for liaison with the new registered parties.

Reactionaries in the Communist Party and also in the KGB appear to have orchestrated the creation of a new party—the Liberal Democratic Party—and an affiliated coalition of groups called the centrist bloc in an effort to siphon support from the democratic parties and portray popular support for the regime's increasingly authoritarian policies. Although the original platform of the party appeared to be moderate, its most recent statements and activities point to a marked shift to the right. The centrist bloc has called for the establishment of national salvation committees, for presidential rule in the Baltic republics, and, as early as December 1990, for a state of emergency in the entire USSR. The center originally gave the bloc positive attention in the media and played up a bloc meeting with Prime Minister Ryzhkov last October in which Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party, and outspoken hardliner Viktor Alksnis of Soyuz were involved

KGB Chairman Kryuchkov met with representatives from the centrist bloc in early February—who espoused support for the union treaty. The bloc, however, failed to gain any legitimacy and the center may have decided to let it die. Members of the bloc met in late March and declared it defunct.

Outlook

Russia's democratic reformers face challenges in the coming months from an increasingly frustrated public and a more hostile and aggressive center, but prospects for reform at the republic level are cautiously positive, especially since reformers won the 17 March referendum calling for the creation of a directly elected republic presidency and the Congress set 12 June for the presidential election.

The public's heightened expectations after the reformers were first elected in the spring of 1990 have been dampened by worsening shortages and political instability. The brunt of public criticism until early this year fell on central and oblast-level governments—still under control of the old guard—and on the "mafia," the shadow economy, and the remaining clout of the party. Recent public opinion polls, however, indicate growing disillusionment with current reformist politicians and disappointment with the new political parties and movements. A poll taken in January by the Russian Republic legislature's public opinion subcommittee indicated that the popularity of the three largest democratic parties declined in the period from August 1990 to January 1991. The Democratic Party's support fell from 21 to 15 percent, the Social Democratic Party's fell from 14 to 4 percent, and the Christian Democrats remained at about 3 percent. If the city councils continue to give the impression of wasting time on minor details, reformist city leaders will face increasing blame for downturns in the local economy.

There is no evidence yet that the public sees a more attractive alternative to the democratic reformers or that it has reversed its negative image of the CPSU. A nationwide poll taken in February by the relatively

reputable National Center for Public Opinion Research showed that, even though deteriorating economic conditions topped the public's list of worries, 50 percent of respondents believed that the country needs democracy, while only 32.5 percent believed that the country needs an "iron hand." Yel'tsin consistently comes in first in popularity polls, albeit at slightly lower levels than last year.

To overcome the present obstacles and move reform forward, the democrats face some formidable tasks. Their progress can be measured on three primary fronts.

To overcome voter apathy and garner public support for reform candidates when and if new elections are held, the democratic parties and reformers are trying to go beyond anti-CPSU rhetoric and develop programs that address the basic concerns of the populace—food distribution, unemployment, safety of pensions, and social security for the poorest. This is especially important because the CPSU is portraying itself as the protector of the working class and the reformers as the instigators of economic chaos. Popov has stated that the democratic movement must appeal to two groups: those committed to the transition to a market economy and those whose interests are not defended by the current regime, including pensioners, workers hurt by the conversion of defense industries to nonmilitary production, and military officers. A leader of the Republican Party stated last November that the main precept the new parties must keep in mind is that their job is not to promise to give food and clothes to the people but to change the institutions to enable people to buy their own food and clothes. Their job is also to convince the public that they are doing this effectively

To institutionalize reform, the democrats in power are trying to restructure governmental processes. Democrats in the republic legislature will push to revise the remaining sections of the Russian Constitution along reformist lines, pass laws that would move the republic toward a market economy and democratic principles, and pass laws that would give local elected governments more power over revenues, essential services, and restructuring the system of councils. The legislature's ability to continue to push through reform measures across the republic will be put to the test during the next Congress, scheduled to begin on 21 May. Unlike the April Congress, which was dominated by political battles, reformers must tackle key reform issues in May as well as push for a strong presidency amendment to the Constitution. Unlike the Congress in December and January, when Yel'tsin was surprised when he failed to win some key votes, Yel'tsin will probably attempt to line up the necessary support before bringing key issues to a vote

At the local level, the Russian Republic legislature is currently drafting a law on councils designed to give the popularly elected organizations a firm legal basis and more control over building their own tax base. Members of the drafting committee told [redacted] that the draft is likely to include many of the points in the Moscow council's proposal for restructuring the Moscow city government—primarily strengthening the council's authority over economic, administrative, and cultural decisions. In some cases, however, reformers may risk setting back "democratic" processes in order to make the councils more efficient. Reformers in Leningrad and Moscow have called for streamlining the size of the councils and strengthening the powers of the executive. But, by strengthening the executive structure—primarily the powers of the mayor—reformers risk weakening the powers of elected councils. Plans that strengthen the executive structure under the current system may also hurt prospects for reform if implemented across the republic, since in many local areas, councils with a high proportion of reformers still have traditionalist mayors. This would change if other cities follow Moscow's lead in holding referendums on creating directly elected mayoral positions

A third test for reformers is their ability to effectively counter the campaign by the CPSU and the center to discredit them and place obstacles in the way of reform legislation. Both reformers in power and the democratic parties will face serious obstacles as a result of the central government's turn toward more authoritarian policies. The renewed assertiveness of the Russian Communist Party and the more restric-

Moscow's Council Structure: The Problems of Democracy

With their takeover of the Moscow city council in March 1990, democratic reformers set out to transform the city into a model of democracy and economic reform that could be held up as an example for the rest of the country. The reformers' goal was to transform the council, which had previously operated as the party's rubberstamp, into a genuine parliamentary body. The inertia caused by the unwieldy size of the councils and lack of experience in formulating comprehensive reform plans have contributed to perceptions that what Moscow needs instead is a strong executive to deal with the acute economic problems the city faces. The city council alone is composed of 498 deputies, and Moscow has over 30 rayon-level councils with 100 to 150 members each.

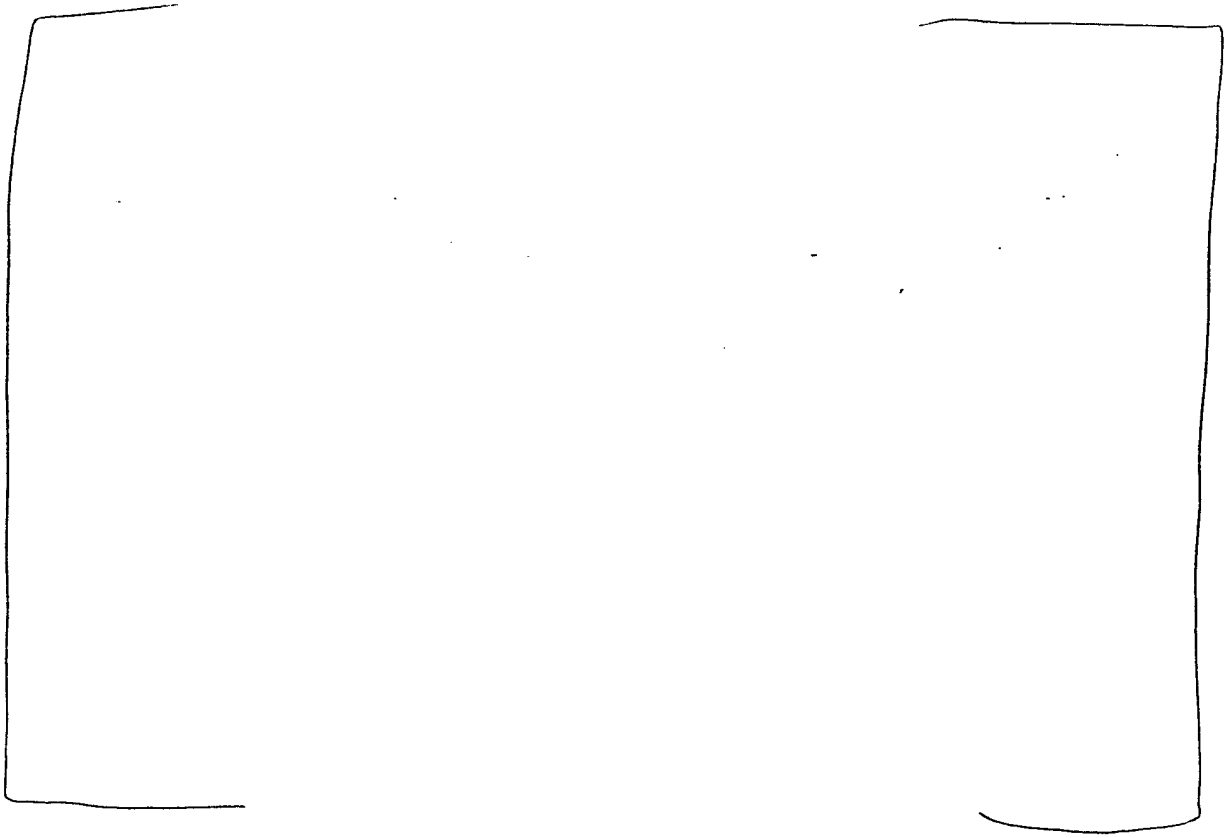
Popov's proposal in January for restructuring the council system would concentrate power in the hands of a directly elected mayor and a much smaller city-level "municipal council." The municipal council would be elected by the city council—relegated to only one or more meetings a year—and would function as the city's primary legislative organ. His proposal would also streamline district-level government, reducing the number of people—currently roughly 5,000—who play a policymaking role in the city government. Both traditionalist and more radical reform deputies in the council have resisted changes in the council system. Radical reformers accused him of curtailing the democratic process by diminishing the powers of the council, and their subsequent proposal for restructuring the system retained the size and powers of the city council. Popov, however, gained a public mandate in the 17 March referendum for a popularly elected mayor.

tive media environment will hinder Democratic Russia's ability to sustain the momentum it gained after the crackdown in the Baltic republics. The parties will also have difficulty attracting new members, especially in outlying areas where the media are still controlled primarily by the CPSU

Reformers are trying to increase their control over the media in order to counter traditionalist criticism, publicize accomplishments, and endorse reform candidates and platforms for future elections. Republic officials have continued efforts to ensure the independence of their media from the center. These efforts have concentrated on acquiring the money, expertise, and equipment necessary to run republic print and broadcast media. The Russian Republic reportedly created 400 city and oblast newspapers and 28 regional ones over the past year. Although the center has cut the air time of the republic's reformist program *Radio Rossii* by 40 percent and relegated it to a frequency that cannot be received throughout the Russian Republic, it continues to transmit reformist news and editorials and act as a counterweight to central television's unabashed antidemocratic stance. Members of the Russian legislature are discussing the feasibility of setting up an independent radio and television broadcast infrastructure, but one republic official estimated it would cost the republic 4 billion rubles just for radio.

Democratic Russia and the new political parties will also continue to hold large-scale demonstrations to sustain their momentum and build local party organizations in the provinces. Without high-visibility activities, the parties will not be able to combat the stiff media campaign against them. Democratic Russia was instrumental in organizing pro-Yel'tsin demonstrations to counter the barrage of criticism Yel'tsin faced after his call for Gorbachev's resignation and, before the 17 March referendum, large demonstrations throughout Russia calling for the public to vote "yes" for the republic presidency. The democrats' party organizations in outlying areas may also intensify efforts to combat the center's accusations by publicizing their own agendas and by exposing corrupt practices of local CPSU leaders

Reformers at the republic level are trying to increase their support within the military and security organizations to bolster their position vis-a-vis the center. Yel'tsin has already sought to limit the center's ability to use force against his republic by insisting that



Russia has the right to participate in military policy deliberations because it contributes the lion's share of the national military budget. He has also pushed for a republic-level KGB. The legislature recently adopted a resolution calling for republic leaders to be included on the national Defense Council.

The passage of the republic's proposal to create a popularly elected Russian presidency was a watershed event for reformers in Russia and the union. Yel'tsin's immediate task is to get the Supreme Soviet to draft an amendment that gives him a strong presidency and then to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority when the Congress reconvenes. He must keep up popular pressure on the Congress from the miners and other supporters and also win over centrist deputies, perhaps by compromising on the powers he seeks for the new post. Yel'tsin's victory in creating a directly elected presidency will also bolster support for new parliamentary elections that would probably result in a more reformist Congress. He has already called for new elections for leadership posts of local councils to follow the presidential election.

In exercising his new powers over the coming weeks, Yel'tsin will try to reassure potential supporters in the Congress that he can handle power responsibly, while demonstrating that with his new authority he can improve Russia's economic performance. He is likely to focus on less controversial, high-visibility issues such as the distribution of garden plots called for in land reform legislation passed last December but delayed in implementation.

If Yel'tsin wins the presidency—which is likely at this point—his battle with Gorbachev and the center will probably intensify. He will undoubtedly use his new position to push even more assertively for radical economic reform programs and Russian sovereignty. The center will also step up its campaign to discredit him although some local Communist Party officials are advocating a more sophisticated approach instead of direct attacks on Yel'tsin, which they believe are backfiring in many areas. The center will most likely

try to block him in the Russian legislature but its main surrogate, the Russian Communist Party, is splintering and lacks voting discipline. In the absence of violence or other use of force, however, the center is unlikely to vanquish Yel'tsin or stop the Russian legislature from becoming more representative of the republic's populace.