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The scientific journal is published since 2011 at the "Publishing House "Science Today". Translated (eng.) version of the journal is published since 2016. Since its inception, the journal was guided by high scientific and ethical standards and today it is one of the leading political science journals in Russia.

The purpose of the journal is to promote scientific exchange and cooperation between Russian and foreign political scientists.

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RUSSIAN PARTY SYSTEM: CURRENT STATE AND DYNAMICS OF DEVELOPMENT

The article shows the place and role of the party system in the political system of Russia, the main stages of the formation of the Russian party system in 1990-2020, analyzes its current state and dynamics of development at the present stage, trends in the changes of their resource base and political and organizational potential.

Key words: *political parties, party system, participation in elections, Federal Law "On political parties."*

The process of organizational and political formation of parties includes the development of the existing political space, the search for their place in the ideological and political spectrum of the society, and the establishment of a solid system of inter-party contacts. In this process, the author reveals both individual peculiarities of each party, significant for the analysis, the number of which, according to some researchers, reaches up to one hundred, [7] and patterns of a more general plan. The rootedness of political parties in the social environment, their ability to innovate politically, to capture and represent diverse public interests, and to transform social demands into programs and goals of a political nature is the main measure of the level of institutional development of the party system.

The party system is integrated into the political system of which it is an integral part. Ensuring the functioning and reproduction of political power, the institutionalization of political and ideological diversity, and political competition for power, it serves as a link between the state authorities and civil society structures. At the same time, in addition to the reproduction of political power, parties perform an equally important task: the sustainable preservation of ideological values, the representation of various social strata in the political process, and the transformation of social requests into programs and values of a political nature. It is the parties that recruit politically active actors into public policy, identifying the main segments of the political spectrum of society with public participation. The most important task of reproducing power is supplemented by the task of reproducing cadres for the political system and reproducing meanings.

The party system is not static: it evolves in the process of political institutionalization of social relations. In this process, the parties that form the party system acquire the structural and functional characteristics necessary for full participation in social and political life, and connections between them arise and strengthen, which give the party system integrity and internal unity.

Questions of typology of party systems and periodization of their development are widely presented in the works of foreign (K. Janda, M. Duverger, K. Lawson, A. Leyphart, D. Sartori, M. Taylor, V. M. Herman) and Russian researchers (S. V. Volodina, G. A. Golos, Yu. G. Korgunyuk, B. I. Makarenko, E. A. Meleshkin, A. Yu. Shutov). Subject-based comparative analysis of various positions and points of view is worthy of a separate subject study [14. P. 54-77]. However, with all the abundance of approaches to the typology of party systems and the allocation of time periodization, three most important, key criteria are used in one way or another. These are: 1) the number of parties in the party system and the potential for implementing new party projects 2) the degree of order of their interaction, competition in relations between them, the dynamics of their turnover in power 3) the public mechanism of integration into the political space, into the system of power relations through elections, participation in the activities of public authorities and other forms of political activity. Each of them in turn can be disclosed and described using a number of detailed quantitative indicators and verifiable qualitative characteristics.

Like any social system, the party system is based on a normative-value basis that sets the formats for orderly interaction of political actors. In the case of political parties, these two facets are particularly clear, and not by accident. The regulatory framework of the party system combines the mechanisms of internal self-regulation and public law regulation. Not being an institution of state power, political parties are functionally included in the system of power relations, they are a link between the state and citizens, ensuring the integrity and stability of the political system. This circumstance requires legal regulation of party creation, activities, participation in elections and the work of state authorities. Moreover, in Russia, legal basis for the activities of political parties was often created by the state on its own initiative, ahead of the real processes of party political or organizational formation, many norms were adopted for future, with the expectation of their subsequent development and turning into self-sufficient functionally demanded political institutions. Although not all decisions made can be considered successful from the current point of view, the Russian practice of creating normative principles of public policy significantly pushes the boundaries of scientific knowledge about the opportunities and risks of political engineering.

In the history of the Russian party system over the past 30 years, we can distinguish several periods in which the Russian party system acquired a new quality. The beginning of each stage has always been a large-scale legally significant event in public life, which predetermined the format of legal regulation of

party activities. Simultaneously within each stage, there was an activation of party-political life, expressed in the intensification of the processes of party building, the creation of new parties or the transformation of existing ones. As a result, parties acquired new qualitative characteristics related both to their legal status and to their real role in the political life of society. Ultimately, all these changes predetermined the process of structuring the party system and its development, evolution to modern political and organizational forms.

The first stage can be roughly described as a stage of crisis of the one-party system and growing prerequisites for the emergence and development of political parties, resulting in the legislative approval of the creation of alternative parties in 1990 and the “first wave” of formation of the parties in 1990 to 1991. It was preceded by a period of internal development of multiparty system (1987-1990) [5. P. 544]. Since 1987, political repressions stopped and informal associations, popular fronts, political clubs, and proto-party organizations have emerged. The process of creating proto-party formations got a new impetus in connection with the elections of People’s Deputies of the USSR in 1989 and People’s Deputies of the RSFSR in 1990. The Declaration “On state sovereignty of the Russian Federation” adopted at the first Congress of People’s Deputies of the RSFSR proclaimed legal guarantees of equal opportunities for all political parties operating under the Constitution of the RSFSR to participate in the management of state and public affairs [2]. The emergence of the first non-Communist opposition parties and subsequent, in 1990, changes in the wording of Article 6 of the Constitution of the USSR and the Constitution of the RSFSR (in particular, removing references to the leading and guiding role of the Communist party), updated the issue of developing the legal basis for the activities of political associations.

The Law of the USSR “On public associations” [15], adopted in October 1990, officially established the features of the creation and activity of political parties: the ban on membership in parties of foreign citizens, the prohibition of joining the party as collective members of other parties and movements, etc. With the recognition of multiparty system in the USSR, there was a real possibility of political institutionalization of various kinds of informal associations and their reorganization into political parties. In 1990-1991, a number of them were officially registered at the all-Union (liberal democratic party) and all-Russian levels (Democratic party of Russia, Social democratic party of Russia, Russian Christian democratic movement). Starting from 1990-1991, the process of mass creation of political movements for the formalization of inter party coalitions and unions took place in parallel with the formation of parties.

The main motives that guided the creators of parties at the stage of spontaneous multiparty formation were the need to create their own political base and the desire to occupy an ideological “niche” in the emerging political spectrum. It cannot be said that the creation of the “first wave” parties did not reflect tec-

tonic shifts in the social structure and public consciousness. However, they were more motivated by the desire to explore the opportunities for political expression that were opening up, including legal public protest and *Fronde*, than by the desire for collective participation in politics. This mainly explains that the name of the parties reflected their commitment to a certain ideological and political trend: social-democracy, liberalism, conservatism, Christian values, the “green” movement, or a wish to revive iconic historical brands (the People’s freedom party, the Party of Constitutional Democrats, the Movement of socialists-populists, the Orthodox constitutional-monarchist party, etc.). The first parties were distinguished by their extreme small number, lack of a social base, and in general, lack of any projection on the social stratification of the society, plus the book-speculative nature of their programs that said nothing to the average voter. The main obstacle to their further activity was the problem of correlating the product of their own self-expression with the real problems of late Soviet and then post-Soviet society. These parties entered the political market with their products, trying not so much to represent real social interests as to find citizens who were ready to support their programs. Despite the high intensity of the formation of such political parties, most of them had not developed, only a few of them managed to find and maintain their niche in the emerging party-political spectrum.

In 1990-1991, a number of important decisions were made on the de-partisation of the state authorities and management, including the inadmissibility of combining positions in state authorities with positions in the leadership of parties, the ban on the creation of party structures in state bodies, enterprises and institutions, the consolidation of disjointed persons in the public service by decisions of political parties, and the restriction of participation of civil servants in the activities of parties. [10. P. 84-98] Further on, all these decisions were introduced in Russian legislation and political practice, having a major impact on the formation of the country’s political system.

The second stage of development of the party system is the stage of post – Communist atomization after the events of August 1991. The removal of the CPSU from the political arena for some time created an atomized party system, when the former monopolistic ruling party no longer existed, and effective mechanisms for interaction between the state and the political forces of society had not yet been created. The newly created political parties were far removed from making managerial decisions and did not have any significant support base or political representation. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic crisis and radical market reforms, the decline in production and falling living standards force political parties to decide on key issues of current policy. In the unstructured political spectrum, parties are forced to measure their basic ideological attitudes with the challenges of real politics, position their attitude to them, and find not only like-minded people but also tactical allies.

During this period, political parties that emerged in 1990-1992 as new projects of non-Communist orientation, as well as parties formed on the ruins

of the CPSU, were trying to fit into the new institutional landscape of the emerging Russian state, which in the absence of mechanisms for political representation was an extremely difficult task. The chaotic nature of party and political regroupings sometimes led to exotic phenomena such as joint political actions of Communists and monarchists, simultaneously held under the red banner and the dynastic flag of the house of Romanov.

The suspension of the CPSU's activities [12] that followed the August events of 1991, and then the termination of its activities and dissolution of its organizational structures [13] served as an impetus for the formation of independent political parties, the prototypes of which for many years existed within it as platforms and ideological and political trends. The collapse of the CPSU organizational structures contributed to the formation of the left wing of the political spectrum and the emergence of Communist and socialist parties in 1991-1992. The beginning of this process was laid by the exit of a part of the Democratic Platform from the CPSU (which formed the Republican party) in 1990, and after the dissolution of the CPSU the following party emerged: the People's party Free Russia, the Socialist Party of Workers, the Russian party of Communists, and the Russian Communist workers' party. After the decision of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation of November 30, 1992, which declared unconstitutional the dissolution of the primary organizational structures of the CPSU and CP of the RSFSR, formed on a territorial basis, it became possible to form the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. As of the beginning of 1993, the Ministry of Justice of Russia officially registered more than 820 all-Russian and interregional public associations, of which only 25 were political parties. By June 1993, the number of political parties had increased to 35 [9. P. 76]. In addition, several dozen associations had the status of political movements.

Elections of deputies of the State Duma of the first convocation, which were carried out on the basis of a majority – proportional mixed model, in which half of the candidates were elected in single-mandate districts and half – according to a proportional system. An electoral association was considered an all-Federal party or political movement if its charter was registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, or a block of such public associations created for the period of elections. Other public associations were given an opportunity to participate in elections by joining electoral blocs, provided such possibility was fixed in their charter. Elections gave a boost to the emergence of new party projects, formation of party coalitions on the basis of which new party were later formed (Democratic Choice of Russia, Yabloko, Women of Russia, the Congress of Russian communities, Party of Russian Unity and Accord, etc.). 13 electoral associations and blocs participated in the first 1993 parliamentary elections, eight of them (LDPR, the Choice of Russia, CPRF, Women of Russia, Agrarian party of Russia, Party of Russian Unity and Accord, Yabloko and Democratic party of Russia) overcame the five-percent barrier.

The intensive formation of political parties in 1994-1995 was largely due to the short break between elections. During 1994-1995, new parties and political movements were created, including the Common cause, Transformation of the Fatherland, the Party of self-government of workers, the Party of beer lovers, etc. In 1994-1995, along with political parties, political movements were intensively created, which ceased to be an organizational form of integration of political parties and essentially became an alternative form of political association. 43 electoral associations and blocs participated in the State Duma elections, of which only four manage to overcome the five-percent barrier (the Communist party, the LDPR, Our Home Russia and Yabloko). At the elections of deputies of the State Duma of the second convocation (1995), all public associations that had a corresponding entry in their Charter received the status of an electoral Association, including many trade unions and organizations that were far from politics, for example, the Association of histologists and embryologists, the Association of lawyers of Russia, the Union of housing and utilities workers, the Russian climbing Federation, etc.

The third stage of development of the party system through its primary structuring based on the results of the electoral cycle (1995-1996) and the regrouping of political forces before and during the electoral cycle of 1999-2000. The 1995 elections were a test of political and organizational stability for parties and movements. By this time, the institutional legal framework of the electoral system has been developed, the legal framework for organizing and conducting regional and local elections has been formed, and the electoral process covered all levels of public power. At the same time, the instability of the party-factional structure of parliaments, the lack of a solid system of socio-political support for the current government were combined with liberal rules for entering the political market of new players, the formation of situational blocks and coalitions. In general, the Russian party system remains polarized during this period.

In 1998, the first attempt was made to streamline the legal requirements for public associations. Possible organizational and legal forms of political public associations were a public organization (including a party) and a public movement (for a political movement). Trade unions, national cultural autonomies, religious organizations, organizations created for the realization of amateur and other non-political interests were not allowed to register as political associations.

In reality, the reduction in the number of political parties occurred only by eliminating parties that had actually ceased their activities in the period from 1995 to 1999. (People's party of Russia, Party of Constitutional Democrats, Russian style, etc.). During re-registration, some parties (Free democratic party of Russia and New left) made a decision (presumably forced) to transform into non-party public associations. By January 1, 1999, 141 political public associations had been registered, of which 139 were registered before December 19, 1998 and could participate in the 1999 elections by nominating lists of candi-

dates. According to their legal form, 77 of them were political movements and 64 were political organizations (44 of them were called parties) [6].

The fourth qualitative stage was the adoption of the Federal Law “On political parties” and the renewal of the party system on a new legislative basis (2000-2004). The Law “On political parties” [3] defined parties as the only type of public association that have the right to participate in the federal and regional elections, while other non-partisan public associations have lost that right. Thus, several tasks were simultaneously resolved:

1. The law created institutional prerequisites for the formation of strong political parties and strengthening of the unifying trends in party building, stimulating the strengthening of the positions of federal parties at the regional level;

2. The hypertrophied state of the Russian party system was overcome, and the parties that have actually ceased to carry out their statutory activities lost their status;

3. Political parties became oriented towards participation in the elections and work of the state and local government bodies as the most important task of their statutory activities.

The concept of the Law reflected the desire for a clearer definition of the role of the political parties and their place in the system of political institutions in modern Russia. The President's Bill was based on the following fundamental positions:

- the right to participate in elections was secured exclusively for political parties and not for organizations with the legal structure of political public associations;

- political parties were supposed to act exclusively at the all-Russian level (the concept of the Law did not provide for the creation and operation of interregional, regional or local political parties);

- framework requirements for the charters of political parties were established, including electability and turnover of their governing bodies and a democratic procedure for nominating candidates during the elections to the federal and local government bodies;

- state funding for political parties was introduced;

- stricter requirements for the organization and state registration of the parties (they were supposed to have branches in more than half of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation with at least 100 members each and a total party membership of at least 10,000 members, etc.);

- possibility for the liquidation of political parties not participating in elections for 5 years (it was later changed to 7 years). At the same time, clear criteria for the party's participation in the elections were defined.

Relatively high requirements to the number of party members (not less than 10,000), a ban on the organization of parties based on national or religious grounds, as well as regional and local parties were aimed at stimulating unifying trends in the Russian party system and the emergence of influential collective actors in the face of political parties with human resources.

It should be noted that by providing for the minimum political party membership and its mandatory participation in elections, the legislator simultaneously expanded the legal possibilities for the political parties to participate in elections, providing for a mandatory proportional component in determining the configuration of the electoral system in regional elections, and for a real opportunity to participate directly in elections by nominating lists of candidates.

In the period from 2000 to 2004, the dominant party was formed, which united two political forces competing in the 1999 elections – the Unity party, the Fatherland movement, and the All Russia movement, and later the Nash Dom – Russia movement also joined it. The creation and formation of the party as a whole followed the classical model of creating all dominant parties: political heavyweights at the center of the political spectrum combined their political and organizational resources to create a single organization.

By the time the fourth convocation of the State Duma elections began in December 2003, forty four political parties had the right to participate in the elections, of which only 6 (United Russia, the Communist party of the Russian Federation, the LDPR, and three other parties in the Rodina bloc) were elected to the State Duma.

The fifth stage (2004-2012) can be described as the stage when major political parties were structured and a party system with a limited number of parties was formed (there were actually four leading parliamentary parties with one of them clearly dominating). A number of leading researchers of Russian parties in their classifications combine it with the previous stage, rightly pointing out to the commonality of the stated key priorities – the emergence of strong political parties responsible to the voters [11. P. 84, p. 94-95]. However, in our opinion, **a certain difference is still seen in the choice of specific legal instruments, the use of which has changed the architecture of the party system by reducing the number of parties.** In order to strengthen unifying tendencies, the legislation on political parties was tightened, leaving small parties with no other option than to join larger party formations or go into political oblivion.

That stage was initiated by amendments to the Law “On political parties”. In the legal sphere, this process was artificially stimulated by a five-fold increase in the minimum required membership of political parties at the end of 2004 (from 10 to 50 thousand members with a simultaneous increase in the required number of regional branches), a ban (since 2005) on the creation of electoral blocs, after which parties that put forward a common list of candidates could no longer sum up their resources in the election campaign.

Stricter requirements for the party membership, combined with the ban on formation of blocs, stimulated unification of parties, especially in the center-left part of the political spectrum, where there was a fairly high level of political competition. In October 2006, on the basis of three parties (the Russian party of life, Rodina, Party of pensioners), the united party “Fair Russia: Rodina/ /Pensioners/ Life” was organized (later it became – “Fair Russia”).

Parties that could not increase their membership to 50 thousand by 2006 had an opportunity to transform into non-party associations (having lost the right to nominate candidates) or were subject to liquidation from 2007. In particular, the Conservative party of Russia, Freedom and Democracy, the Russian Peace Party, the Republican party of Russia, the People's Republican party of Russia, and the Russian Communist workers' party-the Russian party of Communists – were liquidated on that basis. Subsequently, in April 2011, the decision to liquidate the Republican party of Russia (RPR) was overturned by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, which considered liquidation of an existing party a violation of article 11 of the European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms [7].

The number of parties was reduced not only through the liquidation of parties by court decisions, but also through their transformation into public associations (the Democratic party of Russia, Civil force, People's Union, the Russian environmental movement "Green"). Some political parties chose to join other parties, so the Agrarian party of Russia and the Russian United industrial party became part of United Russia, and four parties (the People's party of the Russian Federation, the Party of social justice, Party for enterprise development, and the Party of Constitutional Democrats) joined the Fair Russia in 2007. In 2008, the Peace and Unity party became part of the Patriots of Russia party, and the Civil Force and Democratic party of Russia after transformation into public associations joined the Pravoe Delo party and jointly formed the Union of right forces.

As a result, by the beginning of the 2007 election campaign, the number of parties was reduced to 15, and after the 2007-2008 elections, to seven parties: four parliamentary parties represented in the State Duma (United Russia, LDPR, KPRF, and Fair Russia), and three non-parliamentary parties (Pravoe Delo, Yabloko, and Patriots of Russia), which, however, had their representatives in some regional parliaments and municipalities.

The established system of qualifications with high threshold limits and at the same time broad opportunities for participation in elections ensured broad involvement of political parties in the electoral process. This was facilitated by the massive introduction of proportional representation mechanisms in 2004-2011, including the transition to a fully proportional system of elections to the State Duma and in some regions, to the mandatory election of at least half of the deputies to the bodies of local self-government with more than 20 deputies. In the absence of direct elections of heads of regions, they are given the powers of parties that have the majority of seats in regional parliaments. Political parties that received more than three percent of the vote in State Duma elections were eligible for state funding, which was regularly revised upwards.

However, as the number of qualifications increased, their redundancy became more visible, first of all, they created significant difficulties for the organization of new parties from scratch, they made impossible personal self-nomination to

the State Duma for candidates who do not associate themselves with any political parties, and the electoral choice of seven parties was rather narrow. In combination with the obvious resource preponderance of one of the parties and a rather high seven-percent barrier to the elections to the State Duma and legislative assemblies of most regions, which minimized the possibility of getting into the parliaments for the small parties, such party system caused reasonable reproaches from the point of view of equality of starting opportunities and fair political competition.

The obvious deficiencies of the party system with a small number of parties have led in 2010 to a gradual reduction in the number of party members from 50 thousand to 45 thousand (since 2010) and up to 40 thousand (since 2012). Parties that won five percent or more in the Duma elections, but did not overcome the seven-percent barrier, depending on the results obtained, could get one or two Deputy mandates (in practice, the norm was never applied), and at the regional level, such a party could get one mandate. However, such amendments were not of a fundamental nature and were not able to change the configuration of the system. Only in 2012, against the background of an obvious crisis in the legitimacy of the party and electoral systems, their institutional foundations underwent a serious transformation.

The sixth stage of development of the party system in Russia can be called a stage of radical revision of restrictions and reproduction of the system on a competitive basis. Amendments to the Federal law “On political parties” adopted in 2012 significantly reduced the requirements to the political party membership from 40,000 to 500 members and eliminated the requirements for the minimum number of their regional branches. Almost simultaneously, decisions were made to return the direct elections of the heads of regions and to reduce the barrier to the elections to representative bodies at all levels from 7 to 5 percent. As part of the rejection of excessive partisanship of political activity, a transition was made from a proportional to a mixed system in the elections of deputies of the State Duma, from half to a quarter of the total number of Deputy seats, the proportion of seats that are mandatory for elections under the proportional system has been reduced, and in the elections in federal cities, party lists have become completely optional (Moscow immediately took advantage of this change, switching from a mixed system to a majority system of relative majority in the election of deputies to the Moscow city Duma). Finally, mandatory mixed systems at the level of large municipal districts were abolished.

The liberalization of requirements for the creation of political parties and the procedure for their participation in elections have caused an unprecedented surge in the party building, comparable in intensity with the initial stage of the formation of the Russian multiparty system in 1990-1992. There was an obvious similarity not only in the fast-moving dynamics of the party formation and the abundance of party projects, but also in the attempts to revive the previous pro-

jects from the 1990s under the loud brand names. The radical liberalization of the minimum membership requirements, coupled with information technologies, have led to the emergence of frankly “sofa” dwarf parties that did not have any significant support. However, significant differences were no less noticeable.

In 1990-1991, there was an extensive primary development of the political spectrum, formation of parties took place mainly on the ideological grounds. In 2012-2013, the party system has already passed several electoral cycles, so in addition to reviving the brands of the early 1990s (Social democratic Party, Monarchist party, Peace and Unity party), there were also attempts to recreate recent projects (Rodina, Agrarian party). As it was at the dawn of party system development, when there was a competition in the development of niche brands so again four parties reflected the agricultural theme in their names, the theme of protecting pensioners was reflected in the names of three parties, the women's theme was reflected in the names of three parties, the theme of the protection of the environment was reflected in the names of three parties. It is characteristic that one of the parties, the party of **“Good deeds, protection of children, women, freedom, nature and pensioners, against violence against animals”** tried several niche topics in its name.

In contrast to the early 1990s, the catchy headlines of some parties with were more like advertising slogans either short (“Party of business,” “Party of the future,” “Native party”) or detailed ones (“Party of Social Reforms – profit from natural resources – to the People”; “People's Patriotic party of Russia – Power to the People”). It is also obvious that some parties were guided by the desire to develop social niches that were not fully occupied by large parties, including the protection of the interests of certain groups united by the level of wealth, marital status, hobbies, etc. Examples of such applications for the protection of group interests were demonstrated by the party of Small Business of Russia, the United party of people with disabilities of Russia, the Party of Parents of the future, the Russian party of gardeners, the Cossack party of the Russian Federation.

If in 1990-1993, each party starting its way had every reason to claim leadership in a segment of the political spectrum, and therefore there was a strong rivalry among related parties trying to occupy the same niche. In 2011-2020, party organizers created parties using names and symbols similar to those of parliamentary parties (compare: CPSU, Communists of Russia), abbreviations (KPRF – Cossack party of the Russian Federation) and slogans (All-Russian political party “For justice!”). As practice shows, such techniques allow you to slightly push the electoral positions of the “main brand holder” in specific elections, but clearly does not give prospects to take place of the parliamentary parties firmly holding their political niches. Another feature of the party formation was that it occurred due to the unbundling of the previously created united parties: Civil force party and Democratic party of Russia exited the Just Cause Party, the Patriots of Russia exited the party of Peace and Unity, the Rodina and the Party of pensioners that

had previously been included in the Fair Russia, again became independent. Having joined other parties due to circumstances, they regained their political subjectivity.

In the early 1990s, parties entered the political market in the absence of formal channels of party and political representation. Currently, such channels have been formed and the success of the party project is directly determined by the ability to master them during the elections at various levels. Accordingly, the real political and organizational potential of the party and its readiness to fight and its electoral support were quickly revealed.

The technology of party creation has also undergone significant changes: the process has become more public, since the creation of parties requires a wide range of public events related to the announcement of the party creation, the establishment of an organizing committee, and the opening of an account for the money coming in to provide support for the zero cycle of the party construction. The two-stage nature of the creation of political parties, which first requires registration of the political party and then registration of its regional branches in at least half of the subjects of the Russian Federation, initially excluded the appearance of political figures that did not enjoy support in the regions. However, the requirement for a minimum number of regional offices that has been eliminated since 2012, combined with the development of remote Internet communication technologies that were not available in the early 1990s, made the process of party creation a significantly less labor-intensive.

Finally, an important difference in the formation of new parties was the fact that they are created within the framework of the existing system with four parliamentary parties that have already passed their path of political and organizational formation. According to S. Y. Aseeva and Y. Y. Shashkova, this circumstance is an obstacle to the formation of new parties. "Four parliamentary parties objectively have a resource priority, developed organizational structure of publicity and potential representation for the elite groups at various levels." [1. P. 78] Without sharing the pessimism and skepticism of the above authors, it must be acknowledged that any new party really has to fit into the existing balance of party-political forces and find its niche in terms of an already formed division of electoral segments. Initially, not all newly formed parties were able to master this task. The process of new party formation was most intensive at the turn of 2012-2013, however, in 2014, it slowed down, and since 2016, there has been a reverse trend of decreasing the number of parties. If in 2016, 74 political parties had the right to participate in the elections, at the beginning of the 2018 presidential campaign, their number decreased to 67, by the end of 2018, it was 63, by June 2019 – 59, and in 2020 – 42 parties.

The reasons for the decline in the number of political parties are complex. First of all, the emergence of new party projects was largely opportunistic in nature and was a direct reaction to the simplification of the party creation procedures.

The number of new projects clearly exceeded the demand for them. Further on, those parties that did not develop and could not withstand political competition gradually curtailed their activities, especially since maintaining the current activities of the parties, organizing the work of the party apparatus and ensuring regular financial reporting turned out to be a costly task, requiring certain organizational and financial resources.

In addition, the liberalization of requirements for the party membership was accompanied by the abolition of the signature collection as a condition for the registration in the elections of representative bodies at all levels. In 2014, the requirement to collect signatures was restored, but with a wide list of parties exempt from it, various channels were created to obtain the necessary preferences based on the party electoral activity. Thus, nine political parties, seven of which were created after 2012 and were debutants in the Federal elections, gained the right to be exempt from collecting signatures in the State Duma elections of the seventh convocation in 2016. However, the decision to return the necessity to collect signatures was fatal for a number of small parties created precisely in the expectation of a barrier-free participation in the elections. Such parties did not have the resources to organize the collection of signatures. Meanwhile, the mandatory participation in the elections follows from the concept of the Federal Law "On political parties," which considers the party "an enterprise for the production of politics." By law, a political party is considered to be participating in the elections in one of the following cases:

- If it nominates and registers its candidates in the Federal list of candidates for deputies of the State Duma;
- If it nominates and registers its candidate for the post of the president of the Russian Federation;
- If it nominates and registers its candidates for the position of the highest official of a constituent entity of the Russian Federation in at least 10 percent of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation;
- If it nominates and registers its candidates (lists of candidates) to the positions of deputies of legislative (representative) bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in at least 20 percent of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation;
- If it nominates and registers its candidates (lists of candidates) at the elections to the bodies of local self-government in more than half of constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

Failure to meet the legal requirements on the mandatory participation in the elections for seven years became the basis for the liquidation of twenty three political parties in 2019-2020.

As of September 2020, more than 40 political parties have been officially established and registered in the Russian Federation (1). The basis of the party system is still made up of four parties, and one of them occupies the leading position

in terms of political representation in the government, having a majority in the State Duma and in all regional parliaments (with the exception of the Khabarovsk territory, where the LDPR has won the majority of seats in the Deputy corps in 2019). In most regions, candidates nominated by the United Russia or self – nominated candidates supported by it were elected as top officials. The few cases when a representative of an opposition party won (the victory of a representative of the Communist party in the presidential elections in Khakassia, representatives of the LDPR in the Khabarovsk territory and Vladimir region in the gubernatorial elections in 2018) only confirm the free choice of the voters and the competitive nature of the electoral leadership of the United Russia. In some cases, this also indicates the flexibility of party-political agreements, as a result of which the dominant party considers it possible not to nominate its candidate (as was the case in the gubernatorial elections in the Orel region in 2018 and in the Smolensk region in 2020). Taking into account the obvious circumstances, we agree with the assessments of some researchers classifying the Russian party system within the traditional classification of D. Sartori's party systems [4. P. 163-191] as a multi-party system with a dominant party in power [8. P. 137]. At the same time, it should be emphasized that such dominance is based on the level of support in competitive elections with a wide range of participating parties, whose composition is dynamic.

Fluctuations in the formation of new parties generally coincide in timing with the election cycles, fading by the end of parliamentary elections and becoming more active as they approach. In 2017-2018, the formation of new parties was sporadic. At the same time, in 2020, for the first time after a two-year break, there was an increase of interest in the creation of new parties clearly oriented towards niches not sufficiently covered by the then existing party-political palette.

In 2020, four new parties were registered: "For truth," "Green alternative," Party of direct democracy and "New People." All newly created parties after organizing and registering regional branches were able to participate in the elections on the single day of voting, September 13, 2020. The party "For truth" registered lists of candidates in eight constituent entities, the party "New people" registered lists of candidates in four constituent entities, the Party of direct democracy – In three constituent entities, and the party "Green alternative" – in two constituent entities. As a result of the single day of voting, three of the above parties won representation in regional parliaments, the "Green alternative" is now represented in the Komi and Chelyabinsk regions, the "New People" is represented in the Kaluga, Kostroma, Novosibirsk and Ryazan regions, and the party "For truth" – In the Ryazan region, these parties now have the right to participate in the 2021 State Duma elections without collecting signatures. Thus, on the eve of the 2021 Federal parliamentary elections, the party-political system demonstrates openness to the new party projects and positive competitive dynamics. Today, the Russian party system is entering a phase of preparation for a new cycle of parliamentary and presidential elections, which significantly increases the activity

of political parties. For example, 30 parties have nominated candidates (lists of candidates) for the elections on a single day of voting in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation on September 13, 2020. There is every reason to believe that as the date of the parliamentary elections approaches, the dynamics of the party-political system will become more lively and the intensity of political competition will increase.

NOTES:

(1) List of political parties entitled to participate in elections in accordance with Federal law No. 95-FZ of 11.07.2001 "On political parties" as of the date of official publication of the decision of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation on the appointment of elections (23.06.2020) (In Russ.).

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