

The Dilemma of “Our Home Is Russia” A View from the Inside

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The momentous appearance and stormy undoing of the Our Home Is Russia movement on the Russian scene was one of the most important political events of 1995. The lack of real centrist power, the active competition of a dozen organizations aspiring to fill the void, and the forcing out of a series of claimants from that position all created an environment that encouraged the emergence of a qualitatively new sort of centrism. That centrism relied on state power and the structure associated with it.

The emergence of this “new centrism,” which was not opposed to power but rather represented it or strove to be associated with it, was the recurring theme of “post-October” (1993) political consciousness. The situation presented an obvious crisis for “pure” liberalism, which had suffered defeat at the Duma elections in December 1993, and sorely felt the virtual absence of a real pro-government force in parliament on which one could confidently rely. The two-year history of the first (or the fifth, according to a different historical chronology) State Duma demonstrated that neither the Russia’s Choice faction, nor the more marginal group New Regional Politics, nor Women of Russia could play that role, and, moreover, in many situations that were complicated from a governmental perspective, they often did harm to executive power. Attempts to create moderate pro-government groups during the last year of work in the State Duma—such as “Stability” and “Russia,” which had been formed as a result of the partial exodus of malcontents from Russia’s Choice, the independents, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia—were not rewarded with any notable success. This is partly because, since the spring of 1995, there has been much active preparation for the new elections and a regrouping of forces not only in the Duma, but across the whole political scene.

In this context, the notion has revived of guaranteeing “the unity and harmony of actions” of the legislative and administrative powers by creating in parliament the “reliable fulcrum” of the president and the government.¹ It is significant that the active elaboration of this notion coincided with the reinvigoration of the party structure under the banner of “the fundamental centrist majority” of the electorate. Thus the Union of Realists was formed in February 1995 (led by the former director of administration for the president of Russia, Yu. Petrov), in Omsk the founding congress of the National Freedom Party took place (led by the former general prosecutor of Russia, Andrei Kazannik), and consolidation began of other little-known organizations that traditionally played on the “centrist” arena, but with a distinctly anti-government bias.

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In this respect, there is much sense in the recurring argument of the "realists" that the "radical market blitzkrieg" has failed, and that it is necessary to establish "a new ideology to escape the crisis" by granting parliament the right to control government activity. The leader of the Union of Realists clearly mentioned that his movement advanced "a considerable number" of military goals

that were "close to our own."² A reinvigoration of the Civic Union ideology was carried out by the Unified Russian Industrial Party, whose founding meeting took place in April 1995. The declaration issued by the founding group of the new party, whose key figures were the well-known proponents of traditional centrism A. Volsky and V. Shcherbakov, expressed regret that "during the dramatic years of changes there has been no formation

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of any influential, nationwide political force that could represent all the interests of the national industry and the entrepreneurship that builds up financial capital."³

It was precisely against this background that a plan was devised for creating a "two-part" political center that, according to experts close to the president, would lay the foundations during the 1995 elections for "long-term political stability in the government."⁴ Toward this end, proposed the authors of the plan, it was necessary to do the following: (a) form an authoritative parliamentary majority in the new Duma, (b) "squeeze" the extreme leftists and extreme rightists to the margins of political power, and (c) guarantee a stable political situation in preparation for the presidential elections of 1996.

The success of such a strategy was to be guaranteed by the formation of two major centrist voter blocs under the auspices of two leading political figures, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Duma Chairman Ivan Rybkin. The plan was that Chernomyrdin would unite factions, parties, and associations from the center and "a bit to the right" of center (New Regional Politics, the Party of Russian Unity and Concord, "Stability," "Russia," some professional unions, the "fuelers," part of the military-industrial complex or VPK, regional directors, the "new Russians," certain banks, and so on, but no "radical democrats"). Rybkin was entrusted with the parties and factions "from the center and a bit to the left of center" (Agrarians, social democrats, the Democratic Party of Russia, some Communists and members of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, a part of the VPK, and some professional unions). It was assumed that between these movements there must be some preliminary agreement about the principles of establishing a parliamentary majority and a new cabinet of ministers. "In the future," noted a statement prepared for the higher administration of the nation, "these big voter movements may become a main, normal, two-party system in Russia."⁵

Attention was drawn from the very beginning to a certain artificiality in the creation of a "two-headed" center instead of a single, stable centrist bloc. The

argument of one of the co-authors of the plan, Sergei Shakhrai, was that “a major bloc in the center automatically creates radical flanks, and we get three blocs once again. And a centrist bloc will inevitably be flattened out between extremes.” With two centrist blocs—a rightist and a leftist one—this structure would, in his view, push to the left “extremists like Rutskoi and Zhirinovskiy,” and would push to the right “Yavlinsky and Boris Fyodorov.”⁶ However, during discussions of this idea with Chernomyrdin, counterarguments were voiced. It was said among other things that the creation of two voter blocs that were in many ways homogeneous could chop up the existing centrist electorate, and that in the eyes of the average voter the blocs would not look like alternatives to each other, but would instead create the impression that some behind-the-scenes deal had been reached. And in such a situation, the radical movements on both sides would look like more defined and integral organizations, while the unification of party lists under the aegis of the larger blocs would meet with resistance from the parties and their leaders.⁷ In E. Stroev’s speech at the first organizational meeting of the movement’s board in April 1995, the plan for “squeezing” or “cutting off” the extremist right- and left-wing forces was subjected to considerable criticism.

Running ahead a bit, it should be noted that most of the dangers mentioned then, in April 1995, proved to be well-founded. But in fairness it should be said that the “pro” argument, made by Chernomyrdin’s advisors in the above-mentioned note, showed a certain foresight. It said in part that the creation of pro-government voter blocs would help the centrists in society receive, for the first time in the last five years, “not only a clear political affiliation (focused on actual nationwide leaders), but also the opportunity to have a real choice outside the radical extremes,” and would allow the possibility of “drawing away” regional leaders from the Congress of Russian Communities, and crystallize a “local power party” as a real centrism, rather than under the banner of the radical patriots.⁸

One of the most important political and indeed psychological aspects of the problem was the personal participation of the prime minister in the electoral campaign. Consciously distancing himself from the 1993 elections, Chernomyrdin had constantly maintained the image of a pragmatist and professional technocrat, far above political squabbles, during his whole preceding tenure as head of the government. Meanwhile the situation in the fall of 1994 and in early 1995 gave an impression of instability in the government as a whole, and in its leader in particular. This was enhanced by expressions in the Duma of distrust for the government, and by the rumors arising from time to time about tensions appearing in the relations between president and prime minister. The prime minister’s continued separation from politics led to the formation of a firm anti-government majority in the Duma, and the renewal of a power conflict that had the potential to significantly destabilize society, whatever happened—whether the Duma was dissolved, or the government was sacrificed to appease parliament.

Recommendations were made on the basis of this situation. Participation in the election campaign absolutely should have been dependent on a direct statement from the president and his clear pledge of support. It was necessary to define in a clear and unambiguous manner the “personal political interest” of the leader of the new movement: the possibility of forming and leading a competent administration resting on strong parliamentary support, and continuing a course of reforms. Another delicate task was also kept in mind, of course: eliminating the suspicion of a desire to compete against the current president in the coming

1996 campaign. The option that was chosen allowed Chernomyrdin to assert his claim to his own political territory, avoiding conflict with the president. From the very beginning, the possibility was created for transferring authority to the next in line, if a leader of the movement ("number one" on the federal list) was elected, thereby preserving the status quo.

The "two-bloc" option was in fact supported by the president, who on one hand gave legitimacy to the process of creating both movements, but on the other hand served to push a whole set of "traditional" democrats away from the structure being formed. Thus, as early as the end of April 1995, Democratic

Russia leader Lev Ponomarev called the future voters' blocs "the bureaucrats' party" and announced that his party would not join it,⁹ while the famous activist with the democratic movement of 1989-91, Mikhail Poltoranin, condemned Chernomyrdin's plan, emphasizing that "they will soon start shooting him down."¹⁰ The leaders of Yabloko (Vladimir Lukin), Russia's Choice

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(Yegor Gaidar), and the Republican Party (Vladimir Lysenko) had announced even earlier their refusal to support or to participate in Chernomyrdin's and Rybkin's plan to create centrist voter blocs.¹¹

However, the organizational machine had been neglected, and efforts were begun to create initiative groups in the regions, which in the early stages operated along the existing vertical axis of power, relying on the organizational resources of the administrative directors of the regions. On 19 April in the government residence Volynskoe 2, the first meeting of the Organizational Committee for the voter movement took place with the participation of government members, the president of Kabardino-Balkariya (V. Kokov), of Tatarstan (M. Shaimiev), of Bashkortostan (M. Rakhimov), Moscow oblast Governor A. Tyazhlov, the head of the administration of Orel oblast E. Stroev, and representatives of the scientific and artistic intelligentsia. Such a composition of the Organizational Committee, and of the delegates at the founding congress, which took place on 12 May 1995, displayed the method, already well-tested by the Soviet Communist Party, of offering a "model" selection of candidates, which reflected the main socio-professional and demographic groups and created the impression of having represented all strata of society.

Both at the first meeting of the organizational committee and at the founding congress there was scarcely any dissent on the topic of basic political and organizational principles on which to build the movement, which had already at the end of April acquired the name suggested by Chernomyrdin: "Our Home Is Russia" (*Nash Dom Rossiya*, NDR).

Practically the only warning signal was sounded by the criticism put forth by the president of Tatarstan and seconded by the president of Bashkortostan, addressed to Shakhrai, whom many considered to be the "ideologue" of the

movement.¹² The topic was the argument the latter had made somewhat incautiously about the “provincialization” of Russia, i.e., the levelling out of the rights of regions, oblasts, and republics. The leaders of the republics of the Russian Federation saw this sort of levelling out as a limitation of their own rights—all the more so since by that time the so-called “Tatarstan model” of an agreed-upon differentiation of rights and authorities between the republic and the federal center had already been put into practice. The removal of Shakhrai from participation in NDR affairs put an end to this dissent.

Still another methodological point of contention arose. Mention has already been made of Orel Governor Stroevo’s statement on the “cutting off” of extremists, and his appeal for the movement to include within its ranks the greatest possible quantity of political forces. The Duma deputy V. Nikonov actively supported this point of view, noting at the first meeting of the organizational committee that “our biggest task is to create a very broad coalition.”¹³ Minister S. Shoigu responded: “With a very broad coalition we will gain nothing. At first many people will say they are with us, that they heartily support us, but then they’ll say they are leaving because we have different views, and so on. I think that we should act with a little more discrimination.”¹⁴ In fact, this contradiction was evident in NDR’s very first steps: the impulse to win as broad a political base as possible, and the constant “fading away” of organizations and particular constituencies that for ideological, psychological, or political reasons could not live together under the same electoral roof. The same fate, though on a much larger scale, befell Rybkin’s voter bloc, whose ideologue became Nikonov, proponent of a “broad coalition,” when he was appointed by the presidential team in June 1995. And overall, the broadening out of both coalitions (NDR and Rybkin’s bloc) was seriously complicated by the situation of the pre-election campaign.

The Electorate and Ideology

In conditions of indeterminacy, when sociological polls have predicted eight to eleven seats for NDR at the elections on the list of other parties and blocs,¹⁵ illusions (encouraged by certain analysts) have emerged among existing and reemerging voters’ associations, which could potentially be included in “Our Home” as associate members, that precisely by distancing themselves from NDR they can count on exceeding the 5 percent barrier at the elections. The example of the association “Common Cause” (I. Khakamada, R. Bykov, and V. Dzhanibekov) is significant in this regard. Holding positions generally close to those of NDR, the movement refused, after a long hesitation, to be included in NDR, hoping for 5 percent of the votes. However, the deputy could be only Khakamada herself, if she won one of the Moscow electoral districts. The Our Home Is Russia movement accepted into its ranks twenty-three collective members during the parliamentary election campaign period, but none of them carried even the slightest political weight (with the exception, perhaps, of V. Bashmachikov’s Land-Owners Association).

Rybkin’s bloc entered an even more difficult situation when he was unable to realize his initially declared aim of “splitting apart” the Agrarian Party of Russia, considered a serious political force, and relying on the moderate wing of “patriots.” The Agrarians went to the elections as a single bloc (and were unable to pass the 5 percent barrier), while the idols of the late-Soviet era—General Boris Gromov, Academician Stanislav Shatalin, and singer Yuri Kobzon, heading the roster of the “My Fatherland” group—also broke with Rybkin’s bloc, and also failed to make it into the Duma.

Here it is appropriate to say, with a small deviation from chronology, that the gradual differentiation of political sympathies occurring during the eight-month period of NDR's formation and the development of the pre-election campaign, as it was determined by regular sociological polls, did not lead to any essential changes in the potential electorate of "Our Home." According to the results of one such poll carried out by VTsIOM, characteristics of the model NDR electorate in May 1995 included "a concern for the preservation and development of new forms of Russian statecraft, maintaining the balance between presidential and parliamentary powers, and support overall for the course of reforms." NDR received few prospects for attracting the anti-reformist, conservative part of the population.¹⁶ The task thus became not so much the broadening as the preservation of the base of voters. By the beginning of summer 1995, the situation had changed little: researchers were concluding that "currently, NDR is only attracting the votes of those who 'revere power.'"¹⁷ These included managers from various ranks, trained specialists, military men, and state employees with a mid- to high-income level. More or less similar evaluations were given in polls throughout the whole campaign period (with a certain trend toward increased sympathy for NDR, which mainly was explained by the growing recognizability of the movement and its leader due to their "undoing" in the SMI). The latest evaluations drawn from the election results, however, have shown a roughly equal distribution of sympathies for NDR throughout the various sectors of the population. Indeed, NDR voters have shown themselves to be much less influenced by factors that act strongly on the traditional Russian Communist Party voters, such as social and economic indices (income level, quality of life, and so on).¹⁸

The practical impossibility (despite research by serious sociologists like B. Grushin on the election campaign process) of clearly determining NDR's voters within the usual social parameters has been reflected by a certain generality in the party's ideology, its program positions, and its pre-election slogans. Thus, at the very beginning the movement addressed itself to "practical people," "professionals," and "those who love our common home, Russia." Special emphasis was placed on the fact that these people could be found "in every region" and "in any social group," and that there were "very many people like this."¹⁹ Later, at the second convention for the movement, these ideas were given more precision. NDR was called the "authentically popular movement for the broad center, with solid support among all types of voters."²⁰ "If you look at Our Home and its allies," said Chernomyrdin at the convention, "it will become clear that we have before us Russian society itself, with all its problems, needs, and passions."²¹ In this way, the movement identified itself with society as a whole (or with its main segment), thereby essentially reproducing the model of the avant-garde party, the "party of the whole nation" without any particular class coloration.²²

The array of the main aims and principles that NDR put forward proceeded from this position. "Our main goal is social protection and political stability," announced the declaration of the founding meeting of NDR.²³ Such a general formulation could be applied to virtually any political force, not just a centrist one. But already in the first political documents of the movement there is an accent on the priority of solving the basic socioeconomic problems, of supporting government efforts for economic stabilization, and of developing a "socially oriented market economy" whose components would be a "stable financial system, a fair budgetary and tax system, a higher prestige and value

attached to the Russian ruble, the establishment and support of a rigorous legal procedure for economic transactions, and the responsibility of the federal powers and the directors of the subject governments of the Russian Federation for the institution of an effective social policy."²⁴

It is significant that in explaining the concept of stability in his speech at the founding meeting of NDR, Chernomyrdin singled out such key notions as "political will" and the fact that "the disruption of a third attempt at economic stabilization would not be permitted."²⁵ Meanwhile, the main slogans of the movement focused on concrete tasks that had been accomplished by the government in 1995, especially the tasks connected with economic stabilization. Stability as the development of the market, as the realization of a government

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program—such was the gist of the program put forth by NDR. The "opponents" of stabilization were also named accordingly: the prime minister included among them the "criminal organizations," as well as "weak businesses not fit for life," which manufacture products no one needs and survive only through financial injections from the government. "Speculating financial and trade organizations" that prosper off the high inflation rate

were also included among the enemies of stability.

Even NDR's first political statement had introduced the concept of an "effective state," whose conditions of effectiveness would guide a "professional government" and a "responsible parliament." The movement announced its adherence to the current Constitution of the Russian Federation, placing special emphasis on the federal character of the state in combination with a developing local self-government. Elements of a "statist" ideology were affirmed by arguments for "supporting our Russian army," and by the statement that "Russia was, is, and will continue to be a great world power." Also declared in the very first stages of the movement's history was the important argument that NDR's program "would be neither a new program for government, nor a new catechism for executive power." It was not accidental that a certain distance (or the possibility for such distance) was asserted.

The label "party of power," which had been attached to NDR from the very beginning of the movement, visibly upset NDR directors, and in May and June 1995 attempts were made to reject this image, which was deeply rooted in public opinion and unattractive to the average voter. Getting away from such an image, however, was difficult, and consequently NDR changed its tactics, declaring its position with reference to the power issue: "Yes, we are the party of power. The power of action, not of chatter. The power of duty, and not the power of carelessness."²⁶ Meanwhile, there was an assertion of the main feature distinguishing NDR from the other political forces in the upcoming election: all the others merely criticize, while NDR (or more accurately the executive power) takes concrete, practical action. "Solving problems not with words, but deeds," "competing in this contest as 'the best problem-solver,' not as 'the loudest shouter and weeper'"—these formulas were the basis for the public image of NDR at the elections.

Theoretical Innovations

The assortment of slogans did not solve a more fundamental problem—working out a program for the movement. This was accomplished in a very brief period. Its first version was worked out in July and August 1995 by a group of experts under the direction of A. Shokhin,²⁷ and a draft of the NDR program was introduced for discussion at the second congress of the movement on 12 August 1995. The program was conclusively approved in time for the second stage of the congress on 2 September, after a fundamental revision carried out by a special program commission created by the congress, which brought the document “down to earth” a bit, away from its rather academic heights.

The program, especially its economic portion, contained a series of fundamental, theoretic innovations. Most importantly, it was a peculiar combination of “statism” and liberalism. The task of “adapting a liberal basis for economic life in Russia with the practice of a social state,” as formulated by Chernomyrdin at the first stage of the second NDR congress,²⁸ was solidified by the program. In economic terms, this document underscored the fact that “the liberal stage of reforms for the Russian economy is largely being concluded,” and that the soil had been prepared “for the modernization of the nation’s economy.”²⁹ In accordance with these assertions, the main tasks for the new stage of economic transformation were also formulated. As the main corrective for the heretofore existing ideology of reforms, the program put forth “the idea of national accumulation” to guarantee stable economic growth, the creation of new jobs, and the strengthening of Russia’s economic security. In connection with this, special emphasis was reserved for the idea of “powerfully concentrated national capital,” which was the basis for the respectable task of “strengthening state power in real ways, raising investment activity, increasing the number of jobs, and guaranteeing stable economic growth.”³⁰

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The role of the government in the market economy, described in detail in the NDR program, was categorically different from the neo-liberal conception that had dominated official ideology in 1992-93. It was emphasized in part that the movement is in favor of “a strong state in the economic arena.” At the same time, it was noted that “the government’s center of gravity would be decisively shifted from direct intervention in economic affairs to the creation of conditions that favor the development of business activity.” This point received detailed elaboration in the NDR program. It was noted that the key to these problems lies in overcoming the irrational division of economic power between the federal economic center and the regions (though not to the clear advantage of either of those two sides). It was especially emphasized that strengthening the state’s role in upholding the rules of proper economic behavior would be, with the beginnings of economic growth, the basis for a gradual diminution of the “gray sector” in the economy, and for weakening the criminal presence in economic life generally.

Another point of the program was also relatively innovative. Noting that financial and monetary policy would remain one of the key areas of government

activity, the program called for examining financial stabilization policy only with reference to the main goals of economic management. Rejecting liberal "dogmatism," NDR asserted that "victory over inflation at any price" was not necessary, and that it entailed a continuation of industrial decline, budgetary problems, and crises on the monetary exchange and financial markets. The program also contained proposals for lowering and stabilizing the tax rate, simplifying the tax system, and shifting the center of gravity of tax assessment generally from its fiscal function to its economic stimulation function.

It should be noted that these approaches put forth in the movement's program were reflected in the development of the government's economic policy in 1996.

Characterizing the economic "novelties" in the NDR program, one of its ideologues, A. Shokhin, noted that "in the last three or four years the mistaken belief has arisen that liberalism in the economy, and the development of market institutions and mechanisms, presuppose the state's withdrawal from the economy. Actually what is at stake is the withdrawal of the traditional forms of economic and social organization that were characteristic of the totalitarian regime."³¹ At the NDR's scientific conference in July 1995, the question of "the state's return to the economy" was slated for discussion.³²

To what degree was all this similar to the program declarations of the left-of-center and of the leftists? Similar formulations could not fail to appear, of course, in the program documents of NDR's rivals at the elections. Thus, the social-patriotic movement *Derzhava* (Alexander Rutskoi) promised that its economic policy would be based on an "optimal combination of government regulation, private initiative, and market economic mechanisms."³³ The tasks of "encouraging economic growth, improving the competitiveness of national industry, and increasing the national well-being" were included in the economic platform of the Congress of Russian Communities (Yuri Skokov, Alexander Lebed, Sergei Glazev).³⁴ Although the lines are quite similar, one can see a great difference between the NDR theoreticians

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and the political ideologues of the leftist and patriotic parties in their approaches to economic reforms. The Our Home Is Russia movement relied above all on a real basis of economic policy from 1992 to 1995, a foundation for making structural maneuvers in the following years, partly using traditional means. Yet those same means, neutral in themselves,

would inevitably have a harmful effect if used to carry out the counterproductive task of bringing back the old system of administrative economy, which is what the ambitions of the leftists essentially amounted to.

Other parts of the NDR program contained similar themes. Among them was the assertion, unexpected at first glance, of the necessity of bringing about a rebirth of the Russian nation, which referred at least in part to fellow countrymen in the so-called "near abroad." This issue was traditionally exploited by opponents of the "party of power" on both the right and left. The peculiarity of the NDR position lay in the fact that it was so clearly announced: all these questions should be resolved not on the basis of chauvinism, but of normal democratic processes. The program placed special emphasis on the notion of relying on national traditions, the spiritual heritage of society, and a patriotism

that only when cleansed of chauvinistic overlays could be integrated into the NDR program.

NDR and Its Opponents

NDR could not complain of being neglected by its opponents. The sharply negative portrayals of the movement and its leader in opposing publications like *Zavtra*, *Pravda*, and *Sovietskaya Rossiya* scarcely needs extensive analysis, although on the other hand it was precisely through leftist publications that, for the first time, certain topics compromising the integrity of the NDR director—having to do with accusations that Gazprom funds were used for the election campaign, and so on—were put into social circulation. With great gusto, the formula “Our Home Is Gazprom” was applied by the democrats, and exploited even on the pages of pro-Communist publications. The most conspicuous statement directed against NDR was the announcement printed in *Sovietskaya Rossiya* that “the Yeltsin-Chernomyrdin ‘home’ is a very comfortable place for all sorts of former criminals, speculators, dealers, retailers, prostitutes, and murderers.”³⁵ Publications on the other end of the political spectrum expressed themselves somewhat less energetically, but with the same critical edge. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, analyzing the situation after the events in the Chechen hostage-taking crisis in Budennovsk, which gave Chernomyrdin several political points, nevertheless skeptically noted that it was “unlikely that ‘Our Home Is Russia’ would be anything else for voters than a collection of boring bureaucrats and untalented bosses who are responsible for all of Russia’s troubles.”³⁶

If the fiercely negative position of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and other political forces of the leftist and national-patriotic wing was completely understandable, with the “democrats” criticism this was not the case. The crucial issue was the changes within the “party of power” itself, which made an ideological and political

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evolution from liberalism to centrism over the course of several months. Hence the fundamental rejection of NDR as a political force by a segment of the democratic camp. “We are separated from the party of power by a whole series of very serious disagreements,” wrote Yegor Gaidar in *Izvestiya*.³⁷ He included among these points of disagreement the distribution of the “costs of social protection, financial stabilization, and economic reforms in general,” the growth of the state apparatus, the absence of agrarian and military reforms, and the Chechen conflict. The former director of administration for the president, Sergei Filatov, took a somewhat different but no less critical position when he stated, in a speech before the deputies, that he had “made repeated warnings about the danger, if we follow NDR, of creating a *nomenklatura* power.”³⁸ And in a huge reactionary article published by the administration newspaper *Rossiiskie Vesti*, NDR was accused of a “*nomenklatura* type of self-confidence” and of “piling all the blame for unpopular decisions on the president.”³⁹ It was in our opinion precisely the

dismantling that took place within the party of power that was an essential factor in weakening the election potential of NDR.

NDR and the West

The formation of NDR and the personality of its leader were seen by Western commentators and the Western press generally in the context of the presidential campaign of 1996. One of the first statements in the *New York Times* devoted to "Our Home" asserted that "Chernomyrdin is today the only serious alternative to Yeltsin as president. He represents stability. That image has been carefully sculpted over the past two months after he launched his political party, known as Our Home Is Russia."⁴⁰ In a *New York Times* editorial commenting on the preliminary conclusions to be drawn from the December elections, Chernomyrdin was called "a man who has demonstrated his ability to compromise without betraying the principles of reform."⁴¹

Meanwhile, a sharply negative view toward Chernomyrdin has appeared in a series of Western publications. Using the argument of the government's political opponents Boris Fyodorov and Yuri Skokov (criticism of Gazprom, accusations of corruption), the *Washington Post* in a long article drew a parallel between the Whitewater scandal of Bill Clinton and the Gazprom scandal of the latest "rising star in Russia," Chernomyrdin. Clearly, the meaning of this comparison goes far beyond the problematics of Russian politics. The article ended with a significant passage addressed to the Clinton administration, remarking that it should stop founding its foreign policy on illusions about Russian leaders like Chernomyrdin, and "acknowledge the failure of its Russian policy, to rethink it completely."⁴²

Moskovskiye Komsomolets offered its own explanation of why American politicians have taken such an attitude toward the Russian prime minister. It emphasized among other things that, according to expert opinion, the American raw materials supply corporations connected with the Republican party would stand to earn—if Chernomyrdin retains his post as prime minister—"profits of more than 200 billion dollars; moreover the expansion of those corporations would be slowed by ten to fifteen years because of the long-term contracts signed by Russian raw-materials companies during Chernomyrdin's term as prime minister." Hence the conclusion: "To upset Clinton, the Republicans find it advantageous, strange as it may seem, to upset Chernomyrdin's cabinet."

It is hard to say here how well these hypotheses conform to reality, but the *Moskovskiye Komsomolets* version is open to examination.

Toward the Future

According to official data from Tsentrizbirkom, the Our Home Is Russia movement won 10.13 percent of votes in the federal elections. Ten representatives from NDR entered the Duma as deputies of single-mandate districts. After the formation of the NDR parliamentary faction, fifty-five deputies entered it, and it became the second-largest faction in the State Duma.

At the same time, these results were judged by many analysts to be a "defeat" and even a "failure" for the party of power. Could NDR have counted on more—on 20 or 30 percent of the votes? Any unbiased researcher familiar with Russian political reality would surely answer "no" to this question. An analysis of the election campaign of NDR, its organizational and propagandistic peculiarities and errors, exceeds the scope of this article. But the author is absolutely convinced that the most sophisticated and well-planned actions on the

part of NDR could not change anything. Such is the fate of the party of power—it is feared, it is respected to a certain extent, but it is not voted for.

Notes

1. "Material on the creation of a pre-election association," author's archive.
2. *Trud*, 19 April 1995.
3. *Trud*, 18 April 1995.
4. Note "On Political Stabilization Strategy," author's archive.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Kommersant Daily*, 17 April 1995. It should be noted that Sergei M. Shakhrai is not the only author of this plan. The conception for it was first worked out by the political scientist I. Bunin and his colleagues at the Center for Political Technology. G. Satarov, aide to the president, participated in the project as well.
7. The note "On a Plan for Political Strategy in 1995," author's archive.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Interfax, 26 April 1995.
10. Interfax, 27 April 1995.
11. Interfax, 25 April 1995.
12. Stenograph of the meeting of the Organizational Committee on 29 April 1995, 14-15, author's archive.
13. *Ibid.*, 64.
14. *Ibid.*, 66.
15. *Rabochaya Tribuna*, 26 May 1995.
16. Levinson, A.G., *Voters for the "Our Home Russia" Bloc: a Survey of VTsIOM Data for the Beginning of May 1995* (Moscow, Center for Political Technology), 10-11.
17. *NDR and Chernomyrdin's Supporters according to VTsIOM Data* (Moscow, Center for Political Technology, 1995), 11.
18. *Expert*, No.13, 8-11.
19. Political declaration of the founding congress of "Our Home Is Russia," May 1995, 8, author's archive.
20. *Materials of the Second Congress of the All-Russian Social-Political Movement "Our Home Is Russia,"* 12 August 1995, Moscow, 11.
21. *Ibid.*, 17.
22. Political declaration, 8.
23. *Ibid.*, 2-3.
24. V.S. Chernomyrdin, materials for his speech at the founding congress of "Our Home Is Russia," 12 August 1995, Moscow, 5; author's archive.
25. *Materials for the Second Congress*, 11.
26. Coworkers at the newspaper *Expert*, including A. Privalov, N. Kirichenko, and A. Shmarov, formed the base of the workers' group. Specialists from an array of ministries and institutions also contributed to this work.
27. *Materials for the Second Congress*, 11.
28. *Materials for the Second Congress of the All-Russian Social-Political Movement "Our Home Is Russia" (Second Stage)*, 2-3 September 1995, Moscow, 6.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Materials for the Scientific Conference of "Our Home Is Russia,"* 22-26 July 1995, Moscow, 6.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *The Russian Economy in Pre-Election Party Programs and Platforms*, Moscow, 1995, 9.
33. *Ibid.*, 100.
34. *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 13 July 1995.

35. *Moscovskiye Komsomolets*, 28 June 1995.
36. *Izvestiya*, 28 June 1995.
37. ITAR-TASS, 20 July 1995.
38. *Rossiiskie Vesti*, 22 November 1995.
39. Ibid.
40. *New York Times*, 12 July 1995.
41. Ibid., 18 December 1995.
42. *Washington Post*, 20 August 1995.