

# Politics in Post-Soviet Russia: Where Are the Women?

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In March 1991 the first national gathering of independent women's organizations in the USSR met at Dubna under the slogan "Democracy Minus Women Is Not Democracy," thus highlighting the absence of women's voices in high-level decision making. The breakup of the USSR and the emergence of an independent Russian state changed little with respect to women's access to the halls of power. Although they are 53 percent of the population, women remain outsiders in the Russian Federation's structures of power. The following figures, for March 1999, are illustrative: At the top levels of government there was one woman—Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matvienko; among those holding ministerial portfolios, no women; among President Yeltsin's top aides, one woman—Dzhakhan Pollyeva, deputy chief of the president's administrative staff; among governors, one woman; among mayors of major cities, no women; in the upper chamber of the Federal Assembly, the Federation Council, two women; in the lower chamber, the State Duma, 10 percent of the deputies were women.<sup>1</sup> A ranking of Russia's one hundred leading politicians, published monthly by the newspaper *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, contained four women for April 1999; by far the most influential female was Tatyana Dyachenko, Boris Yeltsin's daughter.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I explore the extent of women's participation in the executive and legislative branches of Russian government, with emphasis on the federal level. In the executive organs of power the absence of women stems from decisions made by powerful political figures and leading bureaucrats; in parliament, public opinion plays a larger role. I will direct attention toward historical continuity, since much in contemporary Russian society, including barriers to women's political participation, reflects ties with the past. At the same time, the 1990s have given birth to new trends and unprecedented events, such as the growing activism of independent women's organizations and the surprising electoral victory of the

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Women of Russia bloc in the 1993 Duma elections. It should be noted that by focusing on the federal level, I inevitably neglect the greater success that women have had in securing political representation across Russia's regional units.

### Women in the Executive Branch

When Sergei Stepashin succeeded Yevgeny Primakov as prime minister in May 1999, *Ivestiya's* headline captured the new leader's first words to his cabinet: "Gentlemen, let's begin work" (*Dzhentl'meny, nachinaem rabotu*).<sup>3</sup> The terminology was apt, as women have not yet shattered the glass ceiling in government. According to sociologist Olga Kryshstanovskaya's study of two thousand members of Russia's political elite in the mid-1990s, women held 3.9 percent of responsible government posts, despite making up 44 percent of workers in the state apparatus.<sup>4</sup> A UN analysis similarly documents the low level of women's representation among top government decision makers, crediting Russian women with holding only 2.6 percent of senior government positions in 1996.<sup>5</sup>

The most extensive data on women's status in the executive branch are contained in a 1998 booklet published by the Russian government. That report shows a steep pyramid in which women congregate at the bottom and fade out at the top (see table 1).<sup>6</sup> Since July 1995 there have been three categories of government workers in Russia. The highest category, not included in table 1, includes appointed and elected officials whose status is defined by the federal constitution, such as the president, cabinet ministers, deputies, and judges. Category B includes high-level executive positions such as federal ministers' aides and leading officials in federal agencies; women do relatively well here, securing almost 19 percent of positions, working as aides, speech writers, press secretaries, and so on.

**TABLE 1. Women in Russian Federation's Executive Branch of Government, 1 January 1997 (in thousands)**

	All	Men	Women	%Women
All government workers	22,692	9,996	12,696	55.9
By position:				
Category B	32	26	6	18.8
Category V	22,660	9,970	12,690	56.0
By group:				
highest	83	81	2	2.4
heads	552	519	33	6.0
leading	2,314	1,870	444	19.2
senior	10,779	5,704	5,075	47.1
junior	8,932	1,796	7,136	79.9

*Source: Informatsionno-analitichesky material o chislennosti i sostave zhenshchin, zanyatykh v federal'nykh i regional'nykh organakh gosudarstvenoi vlasti (Moscow: Komissiya po voprosam zhenshchin, sem'i i demografy pri Presidente Rossiiskoi Federatsiy; Departament po delam sem'i, zhenshchin i detei Mintruda Rossy, 1998), 5.*

But category B employees constitute only thirty-two thousand out of more than twenty-two million Russian workers. The bulk of federal employees are in category V, a five-tiered hierarchy where women form nearly 80 percent of the lowest rung but only 2.4 percent of the highest. For women, the ladder to high-level positions is steep and slippery.

The women who have achieved top political positions have been appointed primarily in the “feminine” spheres of social policy and culture. A handful of women have held ministerial positions: Ella Pamfilova, minister of social protection until her resignation in January 1994; Lyudmila Bezlepina, minister of social protection, 1994–96; Tatyana Dmitrieva, minister of health, 1996–98; Oksana Dmitrieva, minister of labor and social development, 1998; and Natalya Dementeva, minister of culture, 1997–98. Appointed in October 1998 by former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, Valentina Matvienko has held the highest level post of any woman in post-Soviet Russia—that of deputy prime minister responsible for social issues; she has continued to serve in this position in the governments of prime ministers Sergei Stepashin and Vladimir Putin. Thus all the women who have served as cabinet ministers or as deputy prime minister in the 1990s had duties associated with health, social policy, or culture.

Other women have held cabinet-level or politically significant offices. They include Tatyana Paramonova, head of the Central Bank; Natalya Fonareva, head of the State Anti-Monopoly Committee; Irina Khakamada, head of the State Committee on Development and Support for Small Businesses; Dzhakhan Pollyeva and Victoriya Mitina, deputy heads of President Yeltsin’s administrative staff; Liudmila Pikhoya, a top Yeltsin speech writer; and Tatyana Regent, head of the Federal Migration Service. A few well-known women have served as presidential advisers, in particular Galina Starovoitova on interethnic relations in 1991–92, and Yekaterina Lakhova on family and women’s issues throughout the Yeltsin presidency. Last but not least, there is the special case of the president’s daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko.

The post-Soviet era has not broken with the past. Women’s political careers in the 1990s bear a striking resemblance to those found in Gail Lapidus’s pioneering 1979 book on women in Soviet politics.<sup>7</sup> That study emphasized that women were not only rare in high-level state office but largely confined to the “feminine” spheres of social and cultural policy. The appointment of T. Dmitrieva as only the second woman in the combined history of the USSR and post-Soviet Russia to head the Ministry of Health, despite women’s dominance of the medical field, underscores the infrequency of female cabinet appointments at the all-union or federal level. One Russian commentator has explained, not altogether facetiously, that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) considered social policy and culture areas where women could ruin things and no great harm would be done.<sup>8</sup> A more common explanation stems from women’s connection with “compassion issues”; while men protect the fatherland, women protect children, the elderly, the disabled, and the underprivileged in Russian society.

The image of women caring for others fits with the work of the Ministry of Social Protection (following reorganization, called the Ministry of Labor and

Social Development). Its key areas of concern have involved some of the most intractable issues in contemporary Russia: wage and pension arrears and the growing impoverishment of the population. In one of O. Dmitrieva's first interviews after becoming minister of labor and social development, a journalist described the position as "a suicide mission," noting that five different individuals had served as the minister of labor over a seven-year period.<sup>9</sup> O. Dmitrieva fell victim to this revolving door within the year. Nonetheless, the gender stereotypes that depict women as strong advocates of social programs have boosted women's chances for high-level office in this policy niche.

The prominent pro-reform activist Ella Pamfilova served as President Yeltsin's first minister of social protection and epitomized the selfless woman officeholder committed to working on behalf of others. She built her career in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies as a fierce opponent of the luxuries and privileges associated with the Communist Party, and she enjoyed an unmatched reputation for honesty and integrity. She resigned from the government to protest the slow pace of reform, her inability to do anything for the poor, and her sense that the bureaucracy was growing fat against a backdrop of growing impoverishment.

Although lacking Pamfilova's stature as an opponent of official privilege and corruption, Oksana Dmitrieva also sought to do battle on behalf of the poor and the elderly. She took issue with other high officials such as then-deputy prime minister Oleg Susuev and Pension Fund Chairman Vasily Barchuk over the management of the pension fund; she called for the indexing of the minimum wage and insisted that funds did exist that could be mobilized to increase funding in the social sphere.<sup>10</sup> In a similar fashion, Valentina Matvienko, deputy prime minister charged with social policy, has stood for higher social spending and tough action against wage arrears. She won praise, despite a rocky start due to her lack of experience with high-level decision making, for reducing the backlog of unpaid wages; in some cases she personally approached governors and demanded that they pay doctors and teachers.<sup>11</sup>

Women's voice in high-level office has been limited by more than paltry numbers. Short tenures in office, a lack of insider status, and the treatment of women as secondary rather than as central actors also have contributed to marginalization. Brief stays in office have been the rule, as was the case for Starovoitova, Pamfilova, and O. Dmitrieva. There are a few exceptions, such as Regent's survival as head of the Federal Migration Service from June 1992 to February 1999, and Lakhova's service as an adviser on family and women's issues throughout Yeltsin's presidency. At the other extreme stands Mitina's two-month stint as a deputy head in the Presidential Administration.

In addition, women's influence has suffered because they haven't achieved membership in the inner core of government led by Russia's prime ministers, from Chernomyrdin through Putin. Even Pamfilova, a figure popular with the public, complained that decisions were made by a narrow group of advisers close to Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and that she could not even get in to see him.<sup>12</sup> Most high-level women lack the independent public standing of a Pamfilova or Starovoitova and are viewed as following in the footsteps of particular patrons.

Matvienko's promotion to deputy prime minister was widely attributed to her ties to former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov. The press labeled former minister of culture Dementeva the protégé of First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, although she contended she had met him only once. At times the patronage connections take on sexual innuendoes: for example, Lakhova, who has a Sverdlovsk background, has been the target of rumors that she owed her Kremlin position to a past sexual relationship with Yeltsin. These sexual overtones diminish women's standing as major political figures.

There may be an element of continuity here with the Soviet past. As one commentator has contended, Minister of Culture Yekaterina Furtseva, who served under Khrushchev, may not have been all that bad in office, but what the Soviet public wanted to know was who among the party elite was her lover.<sup>13</sup> The Russian scholar and women's movement activist Nadezhda Shvedova has argued that women in politics are judged as potential lovers, evaluated by how much men like them.<sup>14</sup> A telling commentary on this tra-

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dition was the newspaper *Segodnya's* article on the Republican Party's decision to list Pamfilova first on its party list ballot for the 1995 parliamentary elections. The article rejoiced that Pamfilova, along with the glamorous Khakamada, would enrich the public's electoral choice of women politicians,<sup>15</sup> but at the same time it dismissed the Women of Russia electoral bloc as boring. The matter centered on psychophysical differences, or simply differences in physical types: Pamfilova is a slender, attractive woman with long, blond hair; Khakamada, with her half-Japanese background, is an exotic beauty featured in perfume ads while serving as a Duma deputy. These women have substantial records of achievement and do receive serious treatment from the press, but there persists a tendency to trivialize their presence—and the presence of all women—in the political arena.

For women, the route to the top has not followed a single path. Some, like Pamfilova, Starovoitova, Khakamada, O. Dimitrieva, and Lakhova, have been among the “new women,” emerging during perestroika or the post-Soviet period as successful electoral politicians, active in the building of new movements and parties.<sup>16</sup> Others, like Minister of Health T. Dimitrieva and Minister of Culture Dementeva, pursued professional careers connected, respectively, with psychiatric medicine and museum administration. Matvienko and Bezlepkina are products of a third path, that of the Soviet nomenklatura. Matvienko's background included many years of Komsomol work and election to the 1989 USSR Congress of People's Deputies as a candidate from the Soviet Women's Committee, where she served as chair of the Committee on Women, Children, and Family from 1989 to 1991. Bezlepkina rose from a raion committee secretary in

Donetsk to the Organization Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU; at the end of the Soviet era she held the state position of vice chair of the USSR State Committee for Labor and Social Issues. The final route is that taken by Yeltsin's daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko, who enjoyed great influence and ranked as the ultimate insider because of her family connections.

With the exception of Raisa Gorbacheva, the wives and family members of Communist leaders remained in the background. And Raisa Gorbacheva's pioneering effort at forging a new kind of "first lady" met with widespread disapproval because of her expensive wardrobe and what was perceived as her preaching to the public. For women internationally, the "family" route to political influence is familiar: as wives, widows, or daughters, women have gained access to high-level decision making through political partnership and occasionally high office itself, usually by stepping into a position vacated by the death of a spouse or by filling a vacuum created by the physical or mental disability of the formal officeholder. Dyachenko was a controversial figure, seen as exercising undue influence over government policy and surrounded by allegations of corruption and massive kickbacks. Among Acting President Vladimir Putin's first personnel moves was Dyachenko's dismissal from her Kremlin post. As a widespread approach to the empowerment of women, familial relationships with powerful men are not the answer, yet for a few women they expand opportunities.

A pioneering effort to enlarge the options available to women married to top political figures occurred in the 1999 State Duma elections. Yelena Baturina, the wife of Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, ran for a seat from a single-mandate district in the Republic of Kalmykia, where her brother was a leading official. She lost but may be the forerunner of a new type of political woman, who uses family ties as a launching pad for her own political ambitions. An enhanced role for female family members of prominent male politicians does not, however, appear likely in the near future, given the negative reactions to Gorbacheva, Dyachenko, and Baturina.

Although they share much in common with their Soviet predecessors, contemporary women officeholders find themselves confronted with the new issue of how to relate to the growing number of independent women's organizations. Although women officeholders may choose to distance themselves from the women's movement, some have established links with women's organizations and have used them to mobilize support for particular causes. Women officeholders in particular have viewed women's organizations as potential allies in the social sphere: as providers of social services, filling the gaps in the badly shredded Russian safety net. In other cases women officials have sought to mobilize women's groups behind electoral blocs or to forge broad-based alliances for lobbying purposes. Some women politicians have taken an active or even a leading role in the women's movement, while others simply acknowledge that their personal success has symbolic significance for all women in their society.

Pamfilova's views are noteworthy among those women officials interested in promoting the activism of women's organizations with respect to social welfare

and charitable enterprises. In an interview conducted while she was a cabinet minister, she argued that there was great potential in women's organizations and that the women's movement should focus on building a better life for Russia's children.<sup>17</sup> She rejected the feminist direction in the women's movement as extremist and embraced a traditional ideal of self-sacrificing women acting on behalf of children.

Under Pamfilova's successor, Bezlepkina, contacts between women's non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Social Protection began in earnest, particularly with respect to preparations for the the UN World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.<sup>18</sup> Although Bezlepkina took a traditional position concerning the need to focus on the family and to treat men's and women's roles as fundamentally different and determined by nature, she strongly opposed efforts to relegate women to the kitchen and defended women's right to decide their life course for themselves. An advocate of increasing women's presence in state leadership, she pointed out that in some countries women fill 40–50 percent of government posts. Bezlepkina's leadership of the official Russian delegation to the Beijing conference was sharply criticized, as the delegation appeared ill prepared. Nonetheless, the women's movement found within the Ministry of Social Protection allies interested in combating discrimination against women, and a pattern of contacts and joint action was initiated.

During the course of the 1990s, the state's inability to maintain a safety net of social benefits and services increasingly led women officials to look to women's organizations as a means of providing them. For example, Galina Karelova, deputy minister of labor and social development since 1997, has singled out children's summer camps as one area where women's groups could make a substantial contribution.<sup>19</sup> Karelova's personal background involves building partnerships with women's organizations; she has served as president of one of Russia's strongest women's organizations, the Urals Women's Association, which established cooperative relations with regional governors to help unemployed women find new professions or start their own businesses. Joint action with women's organizations is occurring at all levels of government, yet these positive developments do have a downside: they frequently center on children, impoverished families, the elderly, and other issues that reinforce the view that women's voices matter only when they speak as mothers on behalf of the weak and vulnerable in society.

A more generalized sense of gender solidarity was evident in Minister of Culture Natalya Dementeva's comments about how inspired she felt by the government's increased willingness to include women in high government positions, citing her own appointment as well as those of T. Dmitrieva and Fonareva. She argued that women are more dynamic and decisive than men and that they can be trusted with major posts, since they bear more burdens in life and therefore "understand and feel some things more subtly than representatives of the stronger sex."<sup>20</sup> By openly championing the idea that women bring unique qualities and insights to high-level decision making, Dementeva took the unusual step of treating her appointment as significant for all women. Yet the signs of enlarged oppor-

tunities for women proved short-lived, as both Dementeva and T. Dmitrieva were replaced by men.

From an organizational perspective, there are two state agencies that pursue cooperative relationships with nongovernmental groups as part of their general charge of advancing women's rights and opportunities in Russian society. The President's Commission on Women, Children and Demography (CWCD) has existed since 1993 and has increasingly represented an institutionalized point of access within the executive branch for the women's movement. Chaired by Lakhova, whose role as a major player in the development of women's political activism will be discussed in greater detail later in this article, the CWCD has addressed not only traditional issues related to demography, but also family violence, family planning, and equal opportunity for women. It has drawn on American feminist organizations such as the Independent Women's Forum and the Consortium of Independent Women's Organizations as well as government officials, experts, and other societal groups. One CWCD program involved the promotion of women's roles in regional government through leadership courses, but few sessions took place due to a lack of funding and political commitment. Further evidence of the commission's weak position in recent years came in the aftermath of the August 1999 economic crisis, when cost-saving measures threatened the very existence of the CWCD, but its dissolution was successfully resisted with the assistance of women's groups.<sup>21</sup>

There is a second executive branch agency, the Commission on Improving the Status of Women (CISW), founded in 1997, whose responsibilities have included recommending action that would move Russian society closer to international gender equality standards, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Chaired by Matvienko since December 1998, the CISW is charged with coordinating the activities of federal and regional governments and civic organizations, yet the participation of women's organizations has decreased over time. The independent women's movement has not secured formal membership on the CISW, although charitable organizations, trade unions, and the more traditionally oriented Union of Women of Russia (*Soiuz Zhenshchin Rossii*) have been included. The commission's work has remained largely invisible to the public.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the women who have served during Yeltsin's presidency are few in number, concentrated in the "feminine" spheres of social welfare and culture. They operate on the periphery of the major political battles that shape Russia's destiny. Those who make bureaucratic appointments clearly have felt little pressure to include women.

### **Women in the State Duma: 1993–1999**

The introduction of competitive elections led to dramatic reductions in the proportion of legislative seats held by women, from 33 percent in the 1984 USSR Supreme Soviet, to 15.7 percent in the 1989 Congress of People's Deputies, to 5.4 percent in the 1990 Russian republic election. In fall 1993, with the first parliamentary elections in the newly independent Russian state scheduled for



December, three women's groups united to form a women's electoral bloc, the political movement Women of Russia (*Politicheskoe dvizhenie "Zhenshchiny Rossii* or ZhR). To the astonishment of virtually all political observers, ZhR gained 8.1 percent of the party list ballots and finished fourth among the twenty-one parties and blocs involved in that election. The proportion of women in the Duma soared to 13 percent, with ZhR accounting for twenty-three of the sixty women deputies. Women-only electoral blocs, in particular successful ones, are a rarity on the world stage, and a close examination of this bloc is warranted.

ZhR's roots lie in the top-down politics of the communist past rather than in the new, independent women's organizations springing up in post-Soviet Russia. The dominant element in the bloc, the Union of Women of Russia, was the direct successor of the old-line Soviet organization, the Soviet Women's Committee. Its leader, Alevtina Fedulova, had long worked within the CPSU, a background that made feminist groups wary. Yekaterina Lakhova occupied the second place on ZhR's party list ballot. Although she lacked a prior connection with the women's organizations that formed the bloc, she was a former chair of the Russian republic Supreme Soviet Committee on Women's Affairs and the Defense of the Family, Motherhood, and Childhood, and she had become President Yeltsin's adviser on family and women's issues and chair of a commission on women, family, and demography. Her Kremlin connections generated speculation that the Yeltsin camp favored the formation of ZhR as a means of pulling votes away from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF).

The actual decision to create ZhR stemmed from the political establishment's lack of interest in women's issues and concern over expressions of public sentiment to the effect that women belong at home and the belief that women must have an equal voice in politics.<sup>23</sup> Personal ambition probably also played a role. In fall 1993 the Union of Women of Russia reviewed the programs of thirty parties planning to participate in the December elections and found that none took a stand on women's issues. Follow-up letters to these parties inquiring about their positions generated three responses, all superficial. Moreover, the party lists contained few women, suggesting that women's representation in the Duma would be paltry.

ZhR's first press conference highlighted the slogan "Democracy Without Women is not Democracy," but shortly thereafter shifted to the safer, less-contentious "Women of Russia—for Russia." The bloc stressed populist appeals about restoring social benefits and placing a high priority on social policy. They also emphasized the idea that women could bring higher moral standards to political life and peace and consensus to society. Pragmatism ruled: in Lakhova's view, Russian society was not ready for the feminist movement and women's issues, and it was therefore best to approach women through family and children's issues.<sup>24</sup> On the whole, ZhR was not a pioneer but a follower in terms of adopting slogans and issues put forward by earlier feminist groups associated with the Independent Women's Forum.

The circumstances surrounding the December 1993 elections favored an upstart electoral bloc such as ZhR. As the elections took place against the backdrop of

Yeltsin's forcible disbanding of parliament and of tanks firing on the Russian White House, the image of women seeking peace and consensus rather than power may have proved attractive. As one male supporter of ZhR put it, "Better the rolling pin than the automatic."<sup>25</sup> High levels of anger and distrust of political parties and politicians favored outsiders, who benefitted from a protest vote: in this case, ZhR, along with Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, provided handy outlets for voters' frustration. The new electoral rules also contributed to ZhR's success by specifying that half of the members of the Duma be elected from a party list and half from single-member districts. Twenty-one of the bloc's twenty-three deputies gained seats through the party list route. Finally, ZhR benefitted from a legacy from

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the communist past: the extensive network of grassroots organizations associated with women's councils (*zhensovety*). With the exception of the CPRF, electoral blocs generally lacked a grassroots presence.

Within the Duma, ZhR built a record as a moderate, centrist group eschewing alliances with other parliamentary parties or blocs. Fedulova was

elected deputy chair of the Duma, leaving Lakhova as the faction's leader. A ZhR member chaired the Committee on Women, Family and Youth Affairs, from which came the faction's primary accomplishment: the creation of Children of Russia, a multifaceted program that focused primarily on children but also included family planning and a new family code.<sup>26</sup> It is striking, however, that in interviews ZhR deputies often cited as their primary accomplishment the creation of new attitudes toward women politicians: men took them seriously, and women politicians had earned new respect and a place in Russian politics.

ZhR entered the 1995 elections as one of the groups favored to clear the 5 percent barrier on the party list ballot. But the bloc finished just below the 5 percent mark, in fifth place among forty-three competitors. Only three ZhR deputies were elected, all from single-member districts. Defeat was attributed to several factors: the failure to take a strong stand against the war in Chechnya; the failure to deliver on promises with respect to social benefits; the failure to reach out and work with independent women's organizations; and the failure to effectively refute attacks by other electoral groups. And, overall, conditions had changed; growing civic calm undercut support for ZhR as a protest vote.

Had ZhR achieved its goal of winning a place for women in the political arena? The results are mixed. Because ZhR had drawn 14 to 15 percent of the women's vote and 3 percent of the male vote in 1993, party leaders in 1995 sought to counter the pull of ZhR by demonstrating an interest in women voters and a sympathy toward women politicians. The "political woman" was in vogue as parties strove to place women higher on their party list and in single-mandate districts.

The proportion of female party list candidates doubled: excluding ZhR, 14 percent of the candidates were women in 1995, compared with 7 percent in 1993.<sup>27</sup> Yabloko's Tatyana Yarygina, Forward Russia's Bela Denisenko, and the CPRF's Svetlana Goryacheva stepped from the shadows to prominence as they figured among the top three candidates—those whose names actually appeared on the ballot—of their respective party lists. Pamfilova, Starovoitova, and Khakamada all headed electoral blocs. Sensitivity to women voters also took the form of greater attention to social problems and promises to correct the course of reform in this area. Yet finding a woman candidate often meant recruiting famous actresses, an approach actually used by ZhR in 1993, when it placed the famous television and film actress Natalya Gundareva in the third slot on its party list. And party programs, if they addressed women's issues at all, spoke in traditional terms about defending motherhood and childhood. Only ZhR included a plank on equal opportunity for women.

After the 1995 elections, the proportion of women in the Duma fell from 13.5 to 10.2 percent, largely due to ZhR's inability to clear the 5 percent barrier. Of forty-six women elected to the State Duma, thirty-one achieved victory in single-member district elections, and fifteen secured election through a party list. Ten of the thirty-one women who ran successfully in single-member districts did so as independents; the next-largest single group, eight women, ran victorious campaigns as CPRF candidates, but their male party counterparts accounted for an additional fifty seats. Only 7 percent of the deputies (fifteen of 225) elected through the party list ballot were female. Closer analysis of the parties that cleared the 5 percent barrier shows that nine of ninety-nine deputies elected from the CPRF were women; three of forty-five from Our House is Russia; two of thirty-one from Yabloko; and one of fifty from Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party. Women disproportionately stood as candidates from the weaker parties and blocs.

The greater visibility of women became tokenism, the need to have "our woman" prominently displayed as a symbol of the party's concern. The CPRF is illustrative of women's continuing problems in gaining access to actual decision making, as opposed to playing a more ornamental role. After the 1995 parliamentary election, women made up 11 percent of the party's deputies; one of those women, Svetlana Goryacheva, had been listed in the second slot on the 1995 party list ballot and served as a deputy chair in the Duma. Yet only one of the nineteen members of the party's Presidium and nine of its 143 Central Committee members were female.<sup>28</sup> Party leader Gennady Zyuganov praised Communist women deputies as "charming and attractive" and noted that he would not hesitate to include them in government, but at the same time he counseled that women should not ask too many questions or argue about critical issues.<sup>29</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1995 elections, partnership between men and women in the work of the State Duma remained a distant goal. No woman led a faction or deputy group; two of the Duma's twenty-seven committees were chaired by women—the Committee on Women, Family and Youth Affairs and the Committee on Ecological Protection; and three of the forty members of the State Duma

Council were female. The absence of ZhR especially hurt prospects for funding family planning and other programs benefiting women.

ZhR's electoral success and its role in the State Duma in 1993–95 proved ephemeral but did generate increased visibility for women in Russian politics. There was a flurry of activity associated with battling ZhR's electoral influence, but this frequently led to symbolic actions rather than a deeply felt commitment to bringing women into the inner circles of decision making or substantially increasing women's representation in the State Duma.

### The 1999 Parliamentary Elections

The December 1999 elections witnessed a further slide in women's electoral fortunes. As of late December 1999, with 441 of the 450 deputies elected, only thirty-three are women, compared with forty-six in the last Duma. In 1995, thirty-one women were elected from single-member districts, compared with nineteen in 1999; the comparable figures for the party list route are fifteen and fourteen. Women held 13.5 percent of the seats in the first State Duma, 10.2 percent in the second Duma, and 7.5 percent in the third Duma, with a handful of seats yet to be decided. A steady decline in women's representation thus marks the parliamentary elections held in post-Soviet Russia.

The drop in women's electoral success from 1995 to 1999 occurred especially among independents running from single-member districts. Although independents constituted roughly the same percentage of winning candidates in 1995 and 1999, only three women deputies secured election via this route in 1999, compared with ten in 1995. One of those three, Valentina Pivnenko, received backing from Fatherland–All Russia (OVR). In contrast, CPRF women candidates from single-member districts held their own, scoring eight victories in both 1995 and 1999, but in 1999 only two of the Communist Party's sixty-seven party list deputies were female, compared with nine of ninety-nine in 1995. OVR accounted for an additional eight women deputies, five elected from the party list, including Lakhova and former minister of health T. Dmitrieva. Six women were elected from the Unity bloc; four from the Union of Right Forces; two from Yabloko; one from Our Home Is Russia; and none from Zhirnovsky's bloc.

Women's representation in post-Soviet Russia's national legislature thus has declined in each of the two elections held since 1993. What accounts for this? While a thoroughgoing analysis is premature, several factors appear to have adversely affected women's chances. They include (a) a divided women's movement; (b) a political atmosphere that emphasized strong leadership, nationalism, and a "get tough" policy with respect to Chechnya; and (c) a continued practice of exhibiting concern for the women's vote only in a symbolic or manipulative manner.

Divisiveness among women's groups impeded women's marshaling resources behind any one strategy. A serious rupture occurred in ZhR in 1996, when Yekaterina Lakhova broke with Alevtina Fedulova, left ZhR, and formed a new organization with a strikingly similar name, the All-Russian Socio-Political Movement of Women of Russia (*Obshcherossiiskoe Obshchestvenno-*

*Politicheskoe Dvizhenie Zhenshchin Rossii*), generally shortened to Women of Russia.<sup>30</sup> The confusingly similar name was intentional, designed to facilitate the transfer of voter support and the loyalty of regional women's groups to the new organization. Ill feeling between the two former allies and a sense of betrayal among the women associated with Union of Women of Russia has been evident, as both ZhR and Lakhova's group strove to present themselves as the key public manifestation of the women's movement. While the two organizations shared many goals, ZhR was seen as more conservative and less committed to democratic reform.

Before the December 1999 elections, Lakhova worked to expand cooperation among women's organizations by sponsoring the Charter of Solidarity. This charter, signed by thirty-nine women's organizations and ten women politicians and public figures in March 1997, sought to further joint activity to (a) advance the interests of children, women, families, pensioners, and the poor, and (b) secure equal rights and equal opportunity for women. By 1999 over three hundred organizations had signed the charter, but Lakhova acknowledged the need to work out mechanisms for using the document to promote women's goals. Moreover, organizations and individuals who signed the charter did not necessarily support Lakhova's women's movement but simply wished to explore means of strengthening women's influence through joint lobbying efforts.

In early 1999 it appeared that both women's movements would come together behind Luzhkov's Fatherland electoral bloc. In April, Fedulova announced that ZhR would not independently contest the December 1999 parliamentary elections. She threw the organization's support behind Luzhkov's Fatherland bloc, which later joined forces with former prime minister Primakov's All Russia bloc. Lakhova also allied herself with Luzhkov and was placed in the fourth position on the Fatherland-All Russia party list of candidates. But in September 1999 ZhR pulled out of this electoral alliance on the grounds that too few women had been included on the party list ballot and that a traditional, conservative approach had been taken toward the role of women in society. Press reports pointed more to bad blood between Lakhova and Fedulova as a reason for ZhR's withdrawal from OVR.

*Izvestiya's* brief commentary on the impact of ZhR's departure downplayed damage to OVR's cause, instead arguing that the unpleasantness mainly affected Lakhova, who had been awarded a high position on the party list as a representative of "the women's party." In addition, the accuracy of OVR's electoral manifesto was in question, since it declared: "Women! We are your bloc, not only because your movement has joined us, but because we understand women's role in the family and society."<sup>31</sup>

There were, however, two other blocs that claimed that title, the most important of which was ZhR. That organization rapidly formulated plans to contest the December 1999 election. Its top three party list candidates included, in addition to Fedulova, Galina Karelova, the deputy minister of labor and social development, and Nina Veselova, chair of a trade union and of the Moscow oblast women's council. ZhR remained centered on social issues: the alleviation of social inequality; the adoption of more adequate wages, pensions, stipends, and

benefits; and the preservation of free and accessible education and health care. As in the past, ZhR embraced the goals of consolidating women's organizations, promoting women's involvement in Russia's political life, and battling discrimination against women. Another element of continuity involved the argument that women bring higher moral standards to the political arena, an assertion that may have rung hollow given the emergence of Yeltsin's daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko, as a virtual poster child for official corruption. Some new emphases were added, including the protection of children from drugs and from informational material that may cause them psychological harm. While not specifically mentioning Chechnya, ZhR's platform took issue with solving political problems through war. Fedulova noted that the strength of Russia lies not only in her soldiers' heroism but in the love of mothers who defend their children, a veiled reference to Committees of Soldiers' Mothers.

However, ZhR's leader found it necessary to explain why she was not uniting with Lakhova's organization nor with another new women's electoral bloc, the Russian Party for the Protection of Women. Fedulova attacked Lakhova for embracing the view that women's interests could be represented in government by strong men, and she blasted the Russian Party for the Protection of Women as an insult to the female sex, in light of its blanket grouping of women with those who need protection—the weak, the sick, the young, and the old.<sup>32</sup>

The Russian Party for the Protection of Women was founded in 1998 and remains something of a mystery. Headed by Tatyana Roshchina, an official in Moscow's city government, the party grew out of a charity program oriented toward solving military officers' housing problems and improving children's health. Its stress on social policy meant that its electoral platform shared much in common with ZhR. When the party was founded, it had the support of Moscow mayor Luzhkov, the Russian Orthodox Church, and some high military officials, and some considered the party an effort by Luzhkov to corner the women's vote. In any case, the party has remained a marginal player, and as the election drew closer, Luzhkov shored up support from far stronger, better established women's groups, as both Lakhova and Fedulova joined his OVR electoral bloc, though the latter later chose to withdraw.

For all three women's groups, the results of the 1999 State Duma election were disappointing. Lakhova had linked herself and her movement to OVR, the electoral bloc that was heavily favored to do well in the parliamentary elections, until it was eclipsed by the meteoric rise of the Unity bloc during the final weeks leading up to the election. As late as August 1999, OVR coleader Primakov was regarded as the overwhelming frontrunner to succeed Yeltsin as president. But in the run up to the election, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who was closely associated with Unity, rapidly outdistanced Primakov (and everyone else) as Yeltsin's heir apparent, a position further enhanced by Yeltsin's December 31 resignation, which allowed Putin to become acting president. Although OVR finished third in the party list balloting, its performance was lackluster compared with the new star, the Unity bloc. In the mercurial world of Russian politics, new alliances and political movements are continually forming and disappearing, and OVR has

shown signs of crumbling with the defection of some regional leaders to the Putin camp. Lakhova's gamble did secure her a seat in the third Duma, but not membership in a victorious coalition assured of dominating Russia's immediate political future.

ZhR and Fedulova fared even worse, drawing 2.04 percent of the party list vote, less than half its 1995 percentage, and failing to elect any women from single-member districts. For ZhR, after its encouraging fifth-place finish in the party list balloting in 1995 (under the 5 percent barrier by a mere 0.3 percent), this was a dismal outcome, particularly given that the number of contending parties had dropped from forty-three to twenty-eight. The Russian Party for the Protection of Women drew even fewer votes, only 0.81 percent. The 1999 electoral results thus suggest that, particularly in the absence of unity among those women's nongovernmental organizations inclined toward electoral activism, future efforts to field a women's electoral bloc have little chance for success.

The issues and circumstances surrounding the 1999

State Duma elections did not favor women's electoral chances. The terrorist bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow, Putin's surging popularity, and support for the vigorous pursuit of the war in Chechnya countered the emphasis women's organizations generally have placed on what women can bring to public office, namely, a greater ability to compromise and avoid extreme measures like force. There also was a growing reluctance on the part of the electorate to cast votes for small electoral blocs. While it is possible to attribute the electoral defeat of ZhR and the Russian Party for the Protection of Women in part to a public distaste for separate, women-only electoral blocs, it is noteworthy that Pamfilova's For Civil Dignity, which shared a strong emphasis on social programs but lacked the "women-only" element, also drew weak support, a mere 0.6 percent of the vote. The connection between women and "compassion issues" has not yet been harnessed to a winning electoral strategy.

As in 1995, electoral blocs in 1999 focused on manipulating the female electorate and putting forward a symbolic woman or a token few rather than adopting strategies that would bring women into greater decision-making partnership with men. Luzhkov's Fatherland bloc did demonstrate a commitment by initially securing support from both Lakhova's and Fedulova's organizations, but there may be substance to Fedulova's complaint that OVR neglected to include sufficient numbers of women candidates: among its elected deputies, females made up 13.5 percent of those elected via the party list, 10 percent via the single-member district route. These are not inspiring numbers and fall far short of the 30 percent of the bloc's party list that Luzhkov had promised would go to

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***“Putin’s record of executive appointments . . . suggests that his commitment to increasing women’s presence in his country’s leadership is not a high priority.”***

women.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on coming up with a token woman as a gesture of inclusiveness is suggested by Georgy Boos's remark to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Moscow bureau about OVR's draft party list: the fourth position would be offered to a "pleasant female candidate" and the fifth to Agrarian Party leader Mikhail Lapshin.<sup>34</sup> Many electoral blocs featured women in their free air time debates and free air time slots, including Lakhova for OVR.<sup>35</sup> Yet only one of the six blocs that cleared the 5 percent barrier listed a woman among the top three candidates: the Union of Right Forces, which counted Khakamada among its core leadership. Nationally, females made up less than 10 percent of candidates for Duma seats, compared with 14 percent in 1995, even excluding ZhR candidates.

Women make up roughly 56 percent of the electorate, and ZhR's garnering of 14 to 15 percent of the female vote in 1993 sent a strong message to competing electoral blocs that sensitivity to women voters was a serious matter. But that lesson is fading. In December 1999 a VTsIOM survey on how voters lined up behind parties winning seats in the proportional representation section of the Duma showed women voters dividing their loyalties across several major parties. Women constituted 56 percent of OVR's supporters, 54 percent of Yabloko's, and 58 percent of the Union of Right Forces'. Unity's supporters were evenly divided between men and women, women made up a slight majority for the CPRF, and the Zhironovsky bloc had a huge gender gap, with 62 percent of its supporters male.<sup>36</sup> The 1999 election should reduce fears of women's voting as a bloc and underline the obstacles to mobilizing the female electorate behind any one political movement.

In the aftermath of the December 1999 parliamentary elections, the dearth of women in Russia's political leadership became even more stark. On 11 January 2000, Acting President Putin recognized that there are too few women and stated that he would like to see a woman as the next speaker of the Duma.<sup>37</sup> The pro-Putin movement Unity has nominated a woman, Lyubov Sliska, as its candidate. Putin's record of executive appointments as of mid-January 2000 suggests, however, that his commitment to increasing women's presence in his country's leadership is not a high priority.

### **Barriers to Change**

As Nadezhda Shvedova has noted, "Democracy in Russia still has a masculine face."<sup>38</sup> To a large extent the absence of women in political leadership reveals continuity with the communist past. The communist legacy undermined respect for women in high-level politics by including them primarily as symbolic figures in symbolic institutions, the soviets (councils or legislatures). The standard image of the woman deputy was that of a textile worker or of a milkmaid under the age of thirty-five. Women served as propaganda rather than as policymakers. The populace has had virtually no experience with women holding serious political office; party secretaries at the raion level and above were almost always men.

Communism left a residue of negative public attitudes toward quotas, which were employed by the CPSU to ensure substantial proportions of women in leg-



islative bodies. During perestroika, quotas increasingly drew fire as an anti-democratic and discredited element from the communist past.<sup>39</sup> The initial electoral reforms that resulted in the election of the 1989 USSR Congress of People's Deputies, the first reasonably competitive elections since 1917, did employ a new version of a quota system: one-third of the seats were allocated to all-union organizations, including the Soviet Women's Committee, which received seventy-five seats. By 1990, however, thirteen of the fifteen union republics had dropped this system of built-in representation. The distaste for quotas has made it difficult for women's organizations to advance arguments in favor of affirmative action, such as requirements that women constitute a set percentage of a party's proportional list candidates, or promote such measures as borrowed from Scandinavian or Western European practice rather than Soviet communist tradition. Support for such positive discrimination does appear within the "Concept Paper on Achieving Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women," a broad agenda for future legislative activity that was prepared by the Duma Committee on Women, Family and Youth Affairs and passed by the State Duma in November 1997.<sup>40</sup> Although this declaration enjoyed widespread support from a spectrum of women's organizations and reflected the growing networking occurring between nongovernmental women's organizations and the majority of women deputies, it is in danger of becoming just another announcement about women's rights that is not backed up by action.

Another troubling aspect of the communist past involves the lauding of women for their roles as mothers, coupled with "essentialist" or biologically based beliefs about gender differences. Women are typically viewed as "naturally" different from men, as primarily, despite their work force participation, devoted to family and hearth, deriving their primary meaning and happiness in life from motherhood. The serious pursuit of a career is an act of egoism incompatible with being a "real woman." Politics in particular places demands on women that are difficult to reconcile with familial responsibilities. Many regard politics as an ugly business at odds with women's true nature, which involves a primary commitment to love and family. As one commentator put it, women by nature are not suited for the treachery and betrayal endemic to the political world, and those women who do choose a political career suffer, as a rule, from unsuccessful private lives and an excess of male qualities.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the downturn in women's representation within the State Duma and the virtual absence of women among top executive officials, the obstacles to women's entering the political arena may slowly erode in the face of new developments. The number of women's organizations has burgeoned, and coalition building remains at too early a stage of development to write women off as a political force. Popular thinking about "women's nature" can be turned on its head; women officials and political activists frequently contend that women must achieve equal representation with men precisely *because* they are different and thus will bring new agendas, perspectives, and decision-making styles to politics. Finally, the achievements of women in some of Russia's regions prove that substantial inroads are possible: although in 1997 women held only 9 percent of the

legislative seats in the eighty-nine units of the Russian Federation, they accounted for more than 20 percent of the deputies in fourteen regions. Further research on regional differences is called for, since success at the subnational level would provide a pool of candidates for national office, and variation across the regions is marked.

### Conclusion

Women's participation in high-level decision making within the Russian federal government remains low, with no indication that improvement is on the horizon. Public pressure to change this state of affairs is weak, although the growth of women's organizations promises to bring about slow change in the future. Russia's volatile electoral scene produced one successful women's bloc in 1993, which temporarily boosted women's representation within the Duma and spurred greater attentiveness to women politicians and the female electorate in the 1995 and the 1999 elections. Parties have, however, sought to manipulate women voters through largely symbolic measures, such as highlighting "their" woman as part of their electoral strategy, rather than bring women into the inner halls of power. Given their continuing rarity, women political figures attract attention as women, and even a few give the appearance of a hoard. In 1997 an article in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* pointed to the presence of a handful of women on Yeltsin's staff and announced that the "feminization" of the Kremlin staff was under way.<sup>42</sup> It is little wonder that one or two ministers, or simply one vice premier, may for many constitute an entirely acceptable level of women's representation.

### NOTES

1. See Nadezhda Ilina, "Zhenshchina Rossii," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 March 1999, 9.
2. Aleksandr Komozin, "100 Vedushchikh politikov Rossii v Aprele," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 12 May 1999, 11.
3. Petre Fadeev, "Dzhentl'meny, nachinaem rabotu," *Izvestiya*, 28 May 1999, 1.
4. Olga Kryshantovskaya, "Zhdem soviu Margaret Tetcher," *Argumenty i fakty* 39 (September 1995): 10.
5. *Women in Transition*, The MONEE Project, CEE/CIS/Baltics, Regional Monitoring Report, no. 6. (Florence, Italy: UNICEF, 1999), 97.
6. *Informatsionno-analiticheskii material o chislennosti i sostave zhenshchin, zanyatykh v federal'nykh i regional'nykh organakh gosudarstvenoi vlasti* (Moscow: Komissiya po voprosam zhenshchin, sem'i i demografy pri Presidente Rossiiskoi Federatsy; Departament po dalam sem'i, zhenshchin i detei Mintruda Rossy, 1998), 5.
7. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 214-24.
8. Ol'ga Kholyavchenko, "Blondinkam Rossii," *Moskvicha* 42 (November 1999): 4.
9. Lyubov Volkova, "Let Us Meet in a Year," *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 8 May 1998, translated in *Johnson's Russia List*, no. 2182, 18 May 1998.
10. Svetlana Babaeva, "Oksana Dmitrieva: 'Po otnosheniiu k liudyam zhestkie mery nedopustimy','" *Ivestiya*, 2 July 1998, 4; and *RFE/RL Newslines*, 29 July 1998, 7.
11. Svetlana Babaeva, "Pervaya otstavka v kabinete Putina," *Izvestiya*, 9 September 1999, 1.
12. Galina Valyuzhenich, "Moment of Moral Choice: Why Ella Pamfilova Resigned," *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 16 March 1994, 18; translated from *Argumenty i fakty* 5 (February 1994): 3.

13. Ol'ga Kholyavchenko, "Blondikam Rossii."
14. Personal interview with Nadezhda Shvedova, 4 April 1997.
15. Aleksei Kirpichnikov, "Ella Pamfilova stala N1 v RPR," *Segodnya*, 2 June 1995, 2.
16. O. Dmitrieva had been elected to the Duma in 1993 and 1995 as a Yabloko deputy from St. Petersburg. Because of Yabloko's opposition to participation in the government, Dmitrieva left that party when she became a cabinet minister. In the December 1999 State Duma elections she successfully ran as a Fatherland-All Russia candidate from a St. Petersburg electoral district.
17. M. Posokhova, "Ya videla reformu obshchestva s iznanki . . ." *Moskvichka* 34 (November 1993): 1.
18. Valery Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
19. Nadezhda Azhgikhina, "Vlast' dolzhna byt' nezametnoi," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 9 October 1998, 15.
20. "Culture Minister on Women in Government," *RFE/RL Newslines*, 1 September 1997, 5.
21. Nadezhda Shvedova, "Commission on Women, Family and Demography under the President of the Russian Federation," in *Encyclopedia of the Russian Women's Movement*, ed. Norma C. Noonan and Carol Nechemias (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, forthcoming).
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23. Tatyana Khudyakova, "Alevtina Fedulova: Nashe dvizhenie sledovalo by nazvat' 'Zhenshchiny dlya Rossii,'" *Izvestiya*, 2 December 1993, 4.
24. Transcript of "All Things Considered," National Public Radio, 10 December 1993, 19.
25. Elvira Novikova, "Zhenshchiny v politicheskoi zhizni Rossii," *Preobrazhenie* 2 (1994): 18.
26. For a more thorough analysis of ZhR's record in the Duma, see Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia*, note 18 above.
27. Yelena Kochkina, "Nastupaet pora sufrazhizma," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 December 1995, 6.
28. Data for the Presidium are for March 1996; for the Central Committee, January 1995. See V. A. Oleshchuk, et al., *Parlamentskie partii, dvizheniya, ob'edineniya* (Moscow: Panorama, 1996), 8–11.
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32. "My—'Zhenshchiny Rossii,'" *Moskvichka* 48 (December 1999): 4.
33. Laura Belin, "Fewer Women to Serve in New Duma," *RFE/RL Russian Election Report*, 7 January 2000, [www.rferl.org/elections/russia99report](http://www.rferl.org/elections/russia99report).
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41. Petr Akopov, “Men’she zhenshchin v politike i politiki dlya zhenshchin—bol’she liubvi,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 March 1999, 1.

42. Natal’ya Konstantinova, “Prodolzhaetsya feminizatsiya Kremlevskikh struktur,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 22 November 1997, 1.