

# Russia Rotting

July 06, 2011

**The  Moscow Times**

In many autocratic countries, the opposition's goal is to shake down the political institutions that the ruling elite have constructed to maintain their control. In Russia, it would seem that the opposite is true.

Take, for example, the opposition Party of People's Freedom. Despite almost universal predictions that the authorities would never register the Party of People's Freedom, the party's leaders — Mikhail Kasyanov, Vladimir Milov, Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov — went out of their way to fulfill every requirement of the election law.

Even after the Party of People's Freedom included language from United Russia's charter in its own charter to make sure it was in compliance with election law, the Justice Ministry still found that the party's charter did not meet election law requirements.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is building the All-Russia People's Front, which is trying to recruit new members en masse not only from Putin's own United Russia party, but from Russian Railways, the Russian Post, the Union of Composers and hundreds of other organizations.

The very existence of such a political structure not only makes a mockery of the Constitution and election laws, but it also destroys the political institutions that were constructed by the political leaders who initiated the front.

Take United Russia. For years, Putin tried to make it the ruling party of Russia, a modern version of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This is not an efficient system of governance. Almost all developed countries use competitive elections to provide their leaders with proper incentives. This is the most advanced technology to provide effective government.

Nonetheless, some countries use more backward political systems, such as a one-party state. Post-World War II Mexico and China since 1976 are good examples. Although these are one-party autocracies, they rotate the top leaders. It is the party, not an individual leader, who makes most of important decisions.

Although these are a less advanced form of government than an electoral democracy, this system is much more efficient than dictatorships such as Libya, North Korea and Zimbabwe, which are centered on the personalities of their leaders.

A modern one-party state is also better than the Soviet and or fascist types of totalitarian dictatorships, in which a leader's personality cult dominates. The creation of the All-Russia People's Front built around the popularity of Putin is a step backward from the one-party state.

The current state of Russia's presidency is a good example of how the country's institutions have rotted. It is clear that the current president does not hold the power that is provided to him by the Constitution. President Dmitry Medvedev has on multiple occasions floated ideas that he could have enacted by simply signing an order; the Constitution gives him this power.

At the same time, some of Medvedev's powers that are granted to him by the Constitution have been co-opted by Putin — for example, in areas concerning foreign policy. Other presidential powers have not been transferred to Putin but have simply vanished into thin air.

In the end, Putin has weakened a strong presidency — an institution he spent so many years building up.

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*The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.*

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