

ANALYSIS OF THE POST-ELECTION STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE LOWER HOUSE OF THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY OF RUSSIA

HOW GOVERNMENT RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS CAN WORK WITH THE NEW STATE DUMA

October 2021

Issues & Sectors	Parliamentary Elections; the Government and the State Duma; the Organizational Structure of the State Duma; New State Duma Committees
Stakeholders	Parliament; the Government; the President; the Presidential Administration; the Regional Authorities; State Corporations

On September 17–19, elections to the lower house of the Federal Assembly (the State Duma of the VIII convocation) were held in Russia. The pro-Government United Russia party received a constitutional majority of seats: 49.8% of the party list votes and 198 of the 225 seats elected through legislative constituencies. Seats were also won by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (18.9%), the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (7.5%), A Just Russia – For Truth (7.4%) and, for the first time ever, New People (5.3%).

The State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of the VIII convocation commenced its work on 12 October 2021. By 18 October, the leadership of the State Duma and its commissions and committees had been determined and the schedule of plenary sessions approved.¹

The balance between various political groups of influence and the “informal” (internal) structure of the parliamentary corps in the new State Duma has changed.

The structure of those State Duma committees significant for the business community has altered greatly. Given the new powers of the State Duma to approve the Prime Minister, and “civil” deputy prime ministers and ministers (whose powers are latent yet formal), as well as the dynamics of the socio-political climate, these changes will affect both the role of the new State Duma itself and the mechanics of the legislative process, with significant potential impact on the business community.

¹ “Three plenary weeks plus one regional week,” with plenary sessions being held just two times per week.

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OVERVIEW: MAIN FEATURES OF THE NEW STATE DUMA SIGNIFICANT FOR THE CORPORATE GR FUNCTION

- › **The influence of the leadership of the Presidential Administration** on the new composition of the **State Duma** as a whole, as well as on a number of key committees and four (out of five) parties in the State Duma, has grown. The influence of all key political groups is reflected in the United Russia leadership.
- › For the first time in a long time, a **“liberal” mini-faction** has gained seats in parliament, which (exclusively with the support of the Presidential Administration) can reflect the position of “patriotic” (Russian) businesses in the public domain and advocate a moderate expansion of economic freedoms for businesses and regions and a reduction of the impact of the economic leadership on economic processes. However, **it will not have a significant impact on voting and the actual work of the committees.**
- › Despite the successful election results for the authorities and the large constitutional majority for United Russia, **unfavourable socio-political moods** and the risk of growing support for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation as a party of general political protest may present problems in the run-up to the 2024 presidential campaign. This will predetermine:
 - ◇ that **an emphasis is kept on social issues in law-making;**
 - ◇ the periodic introduction of new initiatives by the Federal authorities to **“strengthen business responsibility”** in various sectors;
 - ◇ the further **tightening of the regulation of the internet and “new media.”**
- › Before the Presidential elections, **“underperforming” ministers** from teams other than that of Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin are likely to be **forced to resign their positions**, and the **gubernatorial corps will be actively replenished**, which will include the replacement of ineffective “technocratic” governors following their first term in office.

- › **It is important for the Prime Minister’s team to ensure tangible positive results** from the implementation of new “strategic initiatives” before the next Presidential election campaign gets under way in the Russian Federation (i.e. **by autumn 2023**):²
 - ◇ This will predetermine the government’s desire to **speed up the process of adopting the necessary legislative acts in the “window”** between major election campaigns.
- › **The number of MPs (deputies) with significant experience working in leadership roles within the executive branch**, as well as professional **lobbyists and business leaders**, has grown at both the Federal and regional levels. As a result, the number of State Duma committees, as well as leadership positions within them, has increased.
- › **The composition of those State Duma committees most important for the business community have largely remained stable** in terms of their management and key members from United Russia (a number of former first deputy heads of committees from United Russia were named heads of new committees).
- › Depending on the subject area, **it may be worthwhile for GR professionals to establish cooperation with the leadership of the Presidential Administration**, deputy heads of State Duma committees from the “Leaders of Russia” programme (*the national competition for managers coordinated by the Presidential Administration*) who are aligned with it, deputy chairpersons of the State Duma who wield political influence of their own and the leaders of “heavyweight” industry committees within the State Duma. Working with ordinary members of State Duma committees will be less important and the practice of “remote” work within such committees may be expanded.
- › When it comes to controversial draft laws that affect several areas, it **may be worth making better use of working mechanisms through co-committees that are already provided for by State Duma regulation**, in order to ensure that the interests of industry-specific committees and departments are properly represented.
- › The leadership of the General Council and the Central Executive Committee of United Russia will **strengthen the mechanisms of party control over the activities of its members**, including parliamentary discipline, legislative activity and work with parliamentary inquiries.

Unlike the previous convocation, the **new composition of the State Duma may become a source of leaders for the executive branch in Russia’s regions**. Most governors will not be able to greatly influence the activities of elected deputies in the regions – only the most experienced “political heavyweights” will.

POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES OF THE STATE DUMA OF THE VIII CONVOCATION AND INTERACTION BETWEEN THE STATE DUMA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The following factors set the State Duma of the VIII convocation apart from the previous edition and will influence the legislative process in the State Duma and its interaction with the government:

1) **The new operating procedure for industry-specific committees: changing the government’s influence on the legislative process**

When developing the structure of the committees in the new State Duma, the **“one committee per department” principle** was taken as a basis for most of the industry-specific committees. This creates a number

² In October 2021, the government [approved](#) 42 strategic initiatives to be implemented in the form of federal projects in six areas: social services, construction, the environment, digital transformation, technological breakthrough, and government for the people.

of restrictions, as well as opportunities, for the business community to interact with government departments at the State Duma:

- › The links between departments and specialized State Duma committees will be strengthened and the workload of committees with draft laws from several departments will be reduced. **This could help push draft laws and second readings that are important for departments through more quickly**, especially during the traditionally busy periods at the end of parliamentary sessions.
- › **Government agencies are expected to try and actively influence the creation of expert councils under State Duma committees** which look very much like the public and expert councils operating under the respective agencies themselves in terms of their composition. On the part of the State Duma, the right to form expert councils will be reserved for deputy chairpersons of the State Duma in charge of the respective committees.
- › Despite the narrow specializations of committees, increasing their number will ensure that **lobbying opportunities remain through co-committees for business and competing agencies**. Amendments to State Duma regulations aimed at increasing the importance of conclusions drawn by co-committees when considering draft laws were already adopted during the previous convocation. The fragmentation and specialization of most of the State Duma's industry-specific committees may lead to the increased use of "workarounds" through co-committees when it comes to working on projects that affect the interests of several departments and industries. Given the complex configuration of the political governance of the State Duma of the VIII convocation, **the State Duma leadership may also encourage "competition" between committees** when relevant bills are being reviewed by the State Duma Council of Co-Committees on Potentially Contentious Draft Laws.
- › The narrow specializations of committees and their direct ties to government agencies will **allow State Duma committees to monitor the preparation of bylaws by ministries more closely**, provided that the leadership of the State Duma committee has the necessary political backing for such actions. This is a long-standing sore spot in relations between the two chambers of parliament and government ministries. Another way to tackle the issue of introducing effective bylaws in a timely fashion is the **desire of the State Duma leadership to increase the share of "direct action" laws** that do not require lengthy sub-legislative review for implementation.
- › Relieving the State Duma Committee on Control of its regulatory duties would potentially allow the State Duma leadership – again with political approval (from the Presidential Administration or government leadership – **to introduce, through the State Duma Committee on Control, regulatory impact assessment mechanisms for the most controversial draft laws at the second reading**. This practice has never existed before.
- › The narrow specializations of committees, together with the complex structure of political governance in the State Duma and the competition between high-profile members of the State Duma, **will allow the State Duma leadership to employ the mechanism of creating special (temporary) working groups under the chairmanship of the State Duma** on those issues of legislative regulation that are most important for the business community and the general public.

2) Increasing the number of members of the State Duma with leadership experience in the executive branch: competition between the government and the state duma for influence in law-making

The **number of high-profile members of the State Duma** with extensive experience in the Federal and regional executive branches (former governors and vice governors, former ministers and deputy heads of federal agencies) has increased following the parliamentary elections. They were appointed to leading positions in the State

Duma and a number of committees, as well as in the United Russia party. The current government opposed the appointment of several former Federal ministers to lead the relevant committees.

This could lead to **competition between the State Duma and individual ministries for influence over law-making** and ensure that the State Duma provides a more critical and reasoned assessment of the work of individual ministries that are “lagging” behind (assuming that political approval has been obtained from the Presidential Administration or the Prime Minister).

At the same time, the **State Duma is expected to preserve the partnership format of relations with Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin**, as well as with deputy prime ministers and ministers from his team, during the initial years of its work, since the actions of the Prime Minister are supported by both the political wing of the Presidential Administration and by the State Duma leadership. The political task of the State Duma will be to exert pressure on underperforming ministers who are not part of Mishustin’s team.

3) The growth in the number of industry lobbyists and members of the State Duma from the business world

The **number of professional lobbyists from various industries** in the State Duma has grown, which is due in part to the return of a number of members of the State Duma who were not in the previous convocation. This is especially true of the pharmaceutical, construction, planning and surveying, tobacco, brewing, banking, microfinance and sports betting industries, as well as of retail food, retail pharmacy, online trading and housing and communal services.

In addition, a number of large financial, industrial and resource lobbies have replaced their ageing members of the State Duma with modern GR managers from their respective corporate systems.

For the first time ever, the IT industry is represented in the State Duma at the professional level.

In some “supercommittees,” long-standing heads of staffs and assistants to the heads of committees were given deputy seats.

Thus, from the outset, **the State Duma of the VIII convocation has a more pronounced and modern-looking lobbying profile.**

4) Reducing the share of members of the State Duma representing the social sector in the Russian regions

New “lobbyist” members of the State Duma from large businesses in the Russian regions have partially replaced “government employee” members of the State Duma from the social sector who did lack significant experience in legislative work and so did not wield influence. The number of members of the State Duma from the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (the successor to the Soviet trade union system) and regional trade and education unions has fallen. The All-Russia People’s Front (a pro-Putin movement) has lost its role as a platform for co-opting “new social activists,” ceding this function to the Presidential Administration’s training programmes (the “Leaders of Russia” programme).

New members of the State Duma who are actively involved in the social sector (through volunteering, working for socially oriented NGOs, doctors, etc.) will mostly be involved in the State Duma’s public and political committees, which have little influence on industry regulation, and in terms of industry-specific committees, they will only be involved in the State Duma Committee on Health Protection.

Industry-specific and economic committees are mainly staffed with members of the State Duma who are experts in the relevant fields from the business world or lobbyist groups.

5) The waning influence of the gubernatorial corps on members of the State Duma

The influence of governors on the composition of the State Duma and their activities is likely to weaken (with the exception of those governors who are seen as “political heavyweights”).

Many “technocratic” governors were unable or unwilling to install their protégés in parliament, since they rely on personal ties in their work.

The control they enjoy over the political infrastructure of their regions and the regional divisions of United Russia has diminished (which is reflected in United Russia’s poor showing in a number of regions). This is why they were often forced to nominate a Federal candidate from the Presidential Administration to the State Duma or re-elect corporate nominees. In the previous convocation, far more members of the State Duma aligned themselves with the heads of their regions.

6) Specialized United Russia commissions as a new legislative filter

United Russia will retain its function as an “inter-party filter” created in the last convocation for the initiatives of its deputies – the factional council for legislative activity.

However, potentially **high-profile bills will now have to pass an additional “party filter” in new United Russia** commissions created for the leaders of each of the five major parties. While these commissions are more focused on the social and geopolitical agenda, the work of **three of them** may be significant for business:

- › The Commission for the Development of Eastern Siberia (under the supervision of Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation Sergei Shoigu as part of his New Siberian Cities project; his protégé – the former Head of Tuva Republic – was named Vice Chairman of the State Duma in charge of the Committee on Regional Policy and Local Self-Government);
- › The Health Commission (Denis Protsenko from Mayor of Moscow Sergei Sobyenin’s group);
- › The Commission on Education and Science (Elena Shmelyova, a protégé of the so-called “Kovalchuk Group” and the leadership of the political wing of the Presidential Administration, was elected Head of the e Council of the Sirius Federal Territory).

7) Strengthening discipline within the United Russia party

The leadership of the General Council and the Central Executive Committee of United Russia is planning to introduce a mechanism for members to submit annual reports on the implementation of the election programme and **strengthen discipline within the party when voting on key bills** in accordance with party decisions. Mechanisms are expected to be formalized at the upcoming third part of the United Russia party congress (expected to take place in late 2021), to ensure that the party’s governing bodies will strengthen their control over the activities of the United Russia faction in the State Duma.

8) Curtailing public discussion of contentious bills

It is highly likely that the State Duma of the VIII convocation will put an end to the practice of **carrying out public work with civil society and the opposition on contentious bills** (public hearings with a broad audience, including protest groups, etc.), which was tested on certain contentious bills in the State Duma in 2017–2018.

The Presidential Administration has begun to remove such activities from the current activities of the public authorities and limit the opposition’s ability to use parliamentary platforms for political activity.

Instead, **the practice of holding “semi-closed” working groups with business associations and specialized NGOs (in the form of “extended” committee meetings, etc.)** is likely to be preserved.

9) Introducing “remote meetings” for committees

Initiatives to expand “remote” elements of work in the State Duma are likely to be expanded in light of the coronavirus pandemic, which will reduce the risk of the parliamentary platform being used as a platform for political struggle. These initiatives will presumably be implemented through **“absentee” meetings of individual State Duma committees and online hearings and round tables**. The **restrictions on access to the State Duma** introduced during the last convocation will also remain, including in the context of the pandemic.

Moving a number of committee meetings to a remote format is likely to weaken the effectiveness of lobbyist work with rank and file members of the State Duma and increase the **importance of State Duma committee chairs (for the main “heavyweights”) and deputy chairpersons of the State Duma who supervise State Duma committees informally promoting issues** with chairpersons from the opposition.

THE NEW STRUCTURE OF STATE DUMA COMMITTEES RELEVANT TO THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The increase in the number of high-profile members of the State Duma and the number of factions (from four to five) in the VIII convocation has meant a similar increase in the number of deputy chairpersons in the State Duma (from eight to eleven) and State Duma committees (from 26 to 32). Compared to the previous convocation, the political wing of the Presidential Administration has strengthened its positions at the level of deputy chairpersons of the State Duma and within the leadership of the State Duma committees, installing its protégés in a number of leadership positions.

1) The composition of the State Duma Committee on Budget and Taxes remains almost unchanged

The composition of the *State Duma Committee on Budget and Taxes*, a key committee in the State Duma, has remained almost unchanged at managerial level and most influential members (the committee is headed up by Andrey Makharov, and his long-time legal partner is also on the committee).

The new members of the State Duma in the committee include employees from the regional system of the Ministry of Finance (the regional minister of finance must first be approved by the Federal Ministry of Finance), the Central Election Commission and the alcohol industry.

First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma and State Duma representative in the Government Commission on Law-making Alexander Zhukov was kept on as supervisor of the Committee. He is now the government’s main partner on all inter-sectoral financial and economic committees (the Committee on Budget and Taxes, the Committee on Economic Policy, and the Committee on Ownership, Land and Property Relations).

Given the weakening of the position of Minister of Finance Anton Siluanov in Mishustin’s government, the **Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Budget and Taxes Andrey Makarov will likely increasingly resort to moderately critical rhetoric against the government’s financial wing**, in order to strengthen the position of his committee. He has already applied for draft amendments to be made to the new Budget Code of the Russian Federation and the Tax Code of the Russian Federation within the framework of the State Duma committee.

2) Keeping the State Duma Committee on State Building and Legislation as a “super committee”

The *State Duma Committee on State Building and Legislation*, which was expanded during the previous convocation, has survived. The committee continues to be headed up *Pavel Krashennikov*, who has a close relationship with the leaders of the political wing of the Presidential Administration, and his long-time head of staff was appointed a deputy.

The committee is dominated by members of the State Duma with ties to the political wing of the Presidential Administration and the Security Council of Russia and is supervised by Vice Chairperson of the State Duma *Irina Yarovaya*, who represents the administrative wing of the government (a supervisor from the Security Council).

In addition to issues of judicial reform, **all draft laws on fines and other penalties for businesses** provided for by the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation also pass through the committee.

The Presidential Administration will raise the issue of returning issues of changing electoral legislation to the remit of the committee, which had been transferred to the *State Duma Committee on Control* during the previous convocation (but will be kept under the control of “group” Chairman of the State Duma *Vyacheslav Volodin*).

However, it cannot be ruled out that the State Duma’s VIII convocation will not introduce initiatives to break the “super committee” up into smaller units or pull certain areas from it. The majority of bills passed through this “super committee” during the last convocation and it is likely to be overloaded with draft laws once again. The problem is that the committee itself has shrunk and will thus be unable to cope with the legislative workload. In addition, a number of important members of the committee (from the opposition) were not re-elected, or left for other committees (notably representatives of Business Russia on the protection of entrepreneurs’ rights).

3) The subdivision and profiling of a number of industry-specific State Duma committees under the jurisdiction of Federal agencies

The new structure of the committees is more closely tied to the areas of responsibility of the respective Federal ministries and agencies. **Most of the industry-specific committees follow the “one committee per ministry” formula** (*see Appendix 1*).

Meanwhile, the structure of individual industrial State Duma committees is more complex and involves **interaction with several competing government blocs or ministries** (*see Appendix 2*).

4) The functions of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation are shared across several committees, which may create an environment of conflict within the Ministry

The configuration of the Ministry of Economic Development’s partners in the State Duma is more complex than any other. The positions of Minister of Economic Development *Maxim Reshetnikov* (who belongs to *Sergey Sobyenin*’s “group”) are considered to be shaky. Current and former leaders of the Ministry of Economic Development have repeatedly been the target of public criticism in the State Duma and the Federation Council.

The Ministry of Economic Development will be accountable to three committees:

- › The *State Duma Committee on Economic Policy* (chaired by former Minister of Labour and Social Protection *Maxim Topilin*; the committee is strongly influenced by *Rostec*, *Rosatom* and the head of the political wing of the Presidential Administration). The committee will likely be very critical of the ministry’s policies.

- › The *State Duma Committee on Small and Medium Enterprises* (an inconsequential new committee where members of the State Duma close to the head of the internal political wing of the Presidential Administration enjoy great influence).
- › The *State Duma Committee on Control*, which is expected to coordinate the procedure for assessing the regulatory impact of draft laws that the Ministry of Economic Development is responsible for within the government, as well as the “government hours” programme and interaction with the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation (chaired by the former head of the Presidential Administration’s Domestic Policy Department, Oleg Morozov from Vyacheslav Volodin’s “group”).

The Ministry of Economic Development will interact with a further three committees on specific issues:

- › The *State Duma Committee on Ownership, Land and Property Relations* on, among other things, **contentious issues involving land in economic circulation**, in which the infrastructure bloc of the government (Marat Khusnullin) and the governors of urbanized regions are particularly interested.
- › The *State Duma Committee on Ecology, Natural Resources and Environment Protection* (chaired by the former Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Dmitry Kobylkin) on **climate policy and low-carbon development**, which are of great importance to the government.
- › The *State Duma Committee on Regional Policy and Local Self-Government* on issues of regional development and inter-budgetary relations that have **proven problematic for the ministry in the past**, attracting regular criticism from State Duma and Federation Council officials (although the Ministry of Finance sets the foundations of policy in inter-budgetary relations).

5) Possible conflict between the government and State Duma committees regarding the environment

Another potentially conflict-ridden area in the State Duma is the government’s environmental bloc. A **complex configuration of relations is developing** both within the State Duma itself and through interaction with the respective government bloc **involving Alexei Gordeyev, former minister Dmitry Kobylkin, Deputy Prime Minister Viktoria Abramchenko and minister Alexander Kozlov**, where each of the leaders represents different teams.

Alexei Gordeyev (when he was Deputy Prime Minister) and Dmitry Kobylkin (when he was a minister under him) were frequently at odds during their time in government. Kobylkin would later resign his post, as he and Deputy Prime Minister for the Environment Viktoria Abramchenko did not get along. Abramchenko replaced Gordeyev and immediately set about relieving a number of personnel close to him of their duties. The incumbent Minister of Natural Resources, Alexander Kozlov, is considered by many to be a protégé of Deputy Prime Minister and Presidential Envoy Yury Trutnev, not Abramchenko, and his position is seen as tenuous.

Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Alexei Gordeyev will oversee the State Duma Committee on Ecology, Natural Resources and Environment Protection led by Kobylkin, as well as the State Duma Committee on Agrarian Issues (he has partnerships with the committee’s leaders) and the non-core State Duma Committee on Financial Markets.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE WORK OF THE NEW STATE DUMA

1) The high degree of manageability of the new parliament for the Presidential Administration

The parliamentary elections **produced a fully governable parliament** thanks to the fact that United Russia won a constitutional majority. A Presidential election campaign will commence halfway through the State Duma’s term (we are assuming the most obvious scenario here, that Vladimir Putin will be re-elected for another term). And a political campaign to further integrate Russia and Belarus within the framework of the Union State cannot be ruled out (a constitutional referendum has been tentatively scheduled for early 2022 in Belarus).

Unlike the State Duma of the previous convocation, which was put together without the participation of the current leadership of the political wing of the Presidential Administration (in charge of domestic policy issues), **the State Duma of the VIII convocation has a direct influence on the leadership of the Presidential Administration on key factions and committees.** Furthermore, an informal group of members of the State Duma from the Leaders of Russia project has emerged that is clearly loyal to the political wing of the Presidential Administration.

United Russia's constitutional majority is complemented by an increase in the number of members of the State Duma "delegated" by the Presidential Administration to the A Just Russia – For Truth faction, and partly to the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. This means that the Presidential Administration and the government do not require the support of the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. It also minimizes the risk of the opposition filing appeals with the Constitutional Court (which require the signatures of at least 90 members of the State Duma) and ensures that key political laws will be adopted smoothly (including new laws on the system of regional and local self-government).

2) Long-term socio-political risks remain for the Federal government following the election

While successful from a "technical" point of view, the elections to the State Duma did not properly address long-term "political" tasks related to approval ratings, which will be important in the run-up to the 2024 Presidential elections:

- › United Russia's resounding technical victory did not come with an increase in the approval ratings of the entire power structure, nor did it lay the foundations for the long-term growth of social optimism or increase the stability of public and political sentiments.
- › The "baptism" of the first major competitive elections exposed the weaknesses of a number of "new wave" governors in terms of internal political management. While they led in the United Russia lists, this did not always translate to a high percentage of votes for the party.
- › United Russia's poor showing in a number of regions in the Russian Far East, Siberia and the North once again points to the **failure of the infrastructural "megaprojects" carried out in collaboration with federal business**, and which are so important to the Federal authorities in these "macro-regions," to achieve the desired social and electoral effect.
- › **Support for United Russia continued to fall in large and medium-sized cities.** Both the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the New People party enjoyed a significant boost in support, the former as the "main opposition" force (rather than as a result of increasing affinity for the Communist ideology), and the latter on the expectation that it will defend the interests of the economically active urban class and satisfy the general demand for "something new."
- › The paternalistic sentiments of those voters loyal to the government have increased, **as have the public's demand for further "helicopter money,"** which will probably not be possible on a regular basis outside major election years due to the state of the budget system.
- › During the election campaign, and against the backdrop of the pandemic, **people started to lose trust in the authorities on issues of "state intervention"** into personal and family health (the public – included those who support the government – is divided on the issue of "compulsory vaccination"). This will continue to be a key challenge for the authorities in 2021–2022 as the government starts to roll out mass vaccination of children and adolescents.

These issues **do not create a risk of mass political protests**, thanks to the "effective" work of the "power" bloc, the public's focus on "personal survival" at a time when average household income has decreased during the pandemic, and the weakening of social ties it has brought with it. **Street protests in Russia's regions will largely be local in nature as a response to contentious issues** (controversial construction projects in cities,

the environment, “garbage reform,” the unsuccessful attempts of local authorities to carry out housing and public utilities reform, and reforms in other socially significant areas).

The **approval ratings problem for the authorities will mean that the emphasis on Federal law-making will remain on social issues**, and the Federal authorities will launch periodic initiatives to **“strengthen the responsibility of business” in various spheres**, aimed at improving the social image of these authorities.

There will be a similar demand for businesses to be “socially responsible,” especially when it comes to keeping prices for the final consumer down in various sectors (including via direct regulation), as well as in environmental protection, employment, the credit burden and consumer lending.

Additionally, **internet and “new media” regulation will continue to be tightened** in an effort to calm protest sentiments and their distribution channels, as the corresponding restrictions and technologies will need to be introduced and tested before the start of the 2024 Presidential election campaign.

3) The chances of a government reshuffle before the Presidential election

With the exception of the high personal ratings of Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and key members of the “presidential bloc,” **approval ratings of the government’s activities are generally very low**, comparable to those of the “unpopular” government of Dmitry Medvedev towards the end of its term (early 2020). No initiatives are in place to increase social optimism in the long term. Meanwhile, the government and regional governors are busy trying to introduce quick and tangible improvements for society before the start of the Presidential election campaign (i.e. by autumn 2023).

This could lead to **more frequent personnel changes within the government** (the replacement of individual members of the State Duma, rather than changing the composition of the government entirely) and at the gubernatorial level (only the “heavyweights” and the most politically successful of the “new breed” of regional heads will be safe, with most governors serving one term only).³

In terms of interaction with the government during the initial years of the work of the new deputy corps, this means that the **State Duma will be a more politically stable government body during its five-year term to 2024 than individual ministries and agencies**, which will have to show that the federal strategic initiatives they implement over the next two years are bringing real results.

4) The new State Duma as a potential source of personnel for regional authorities

It is entirely possible that the State Duma of the VIII convocation **will once again become a source of personnel for the executive power structures in Russia’s regions**. The new principles of training management introduced by the Presidential Administration in 2017 have meant that parliament (and the party reserve of United Russia) has lost its status as a “candidate pool” in recent years. In the previous convocation, only a very small number of members of the State Duma were appointed regional governors (allowing the opposition to meet the “opposition quota”).

The composition of the State Duma of the VIII convocation still includes several members of the State Duma from large corporations and federal groups of influence who have long been “awaiting appointment” and have passed the

³ The problem of continually promoting “political heavyweight” governors in resource-rich regions and appointing their successors without disrupting the balance of elite groups of influence is being addressed by the recently introduced draft law on a new system of organizing regional power. The main reason for scrapping the two-term limit for governors is to keep in office Mayor of Moscow Sergei Sobyenin and Governor of Moscow Region Andrei Vorobyov, whose terms expire in 2023 (which means that replacements would need to be found before the end of 2022 at the latest), and, looking forward, President of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov and Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov, whose terms end in 2025 and 2026, respectively.

relevant Presidential Administration courses. A large number of new State Duma members who are graduates of the “Leaders of Russia” programmes will also be considered for the post of governor.

At the same time, the Presidential Administration will **continue the large-scale rotation of its governor corps**, taking into account United Russia’s disappointing showing in a number of regions, **which will last until 2022 and into early 2023, with an eye on the Presidential elections.**⁴ Many of the “technocratic” governors whose terms will be coming to an end in 2021–2022 and who performed poorly in the elections to the State Duma will not be allowed to run for a second term.

5) Contradictions within the “opposition” factions and the restructuring of the party field in favour of the “New People” party

We **predict that discipline will worsen within the Liberal Democratic and A Just Russia parties** in the State Duma of the VIII convocation. Internal contradictions are likely to increase as a result of the impending departures of their leaders and the lack of uniformity within the parties themselves. This could lead to **business and departmental initiatives being pushed through over the heads** of the leaders of these parties.

In both factions, new members of the State Duma with no ties to the current party leadership who are loyal to the Presidential Administration have been installed in leading positions. Conversely, many long-term associates of the Liberal Democratic and A Just Russia parties’ management were left out of the State Duma.

There have already been signs of dissension in the ranks of the Liberal Democratic Party, for example when many of the party’s deputies (at the initiative of the leaders of the party apparatus – the shadow political bloc) went against its leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and voted for the Communist Party’s candidate for Deputy Chairperson.

The reformatting of the party field will begin with a **further weakening of the electoral positions of the Liberal Democratic Party** (first and foremost) and, to a lesser extent, **A Just Russia**. In its current composition, A Just Russia is likely to make the Presidential Administration mostly conservative and patriotic, with elements of left-wing populism. The Liberal Democratic Party and its competent branches have felt the pressure of the Presidential Administration over the past year. During the election campaign, the Democratic Party lost its image as an “anti-establishment” party and was the main **“donor” of votes to the New People party** – a key political project of the Presidential Administration. We predict that the Presidential Administration will attempt to oust the Liberal Democratic Party from the State Duma by the next convocation.

With the backing of the Presidential Administration, **public support for the for the New People party**, led by entrepreneurs Alexey Nechayev and Alexander Davankov (of Faberlic cosmetics), is **likely to grow**. The party is seen as a personal project of the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, Sergei Kiriyenko. The faction is predominantly comprised of people working for Nechayev’s companies, meaning that the party is independent and is not beholden to big business or regional elites. The party’s first actions in parliament show that it can be used in disputes between the “political” wing of the Presidential Administration and the “administrative” branches,⁵ as well as, in the long term, to support the regions in disputes between the “new breed” of governors and the Ministry of Finance. Government-backed public opinion centres noted an increase in New People’s ratings thanks to the missteps of the Liberal Democratic Party and A Just Russia.

⁴ Rosatom’s A. Avdeyev, who served as a State Duma deputy of the VII convocation, was the first former deputy to be named an acting governor in autumn 2021. His appointment to Vladimir Region (as well as that of the two new interim governors of the Yaroslavl and Tambov regions) is very much in line with the Presidential Administration’s recent “technocratic” policy of selecting governors from Federal groups of influence who have experience working in the Federal authorities and do not have any connections with the local elites.

⁵ The party’s leader, Alexey Nechaev, spoke out in parliament against placing the rector of the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, who is purportedly a close friend of Sergei Kiriyenko, in a pre-trial detention centre. As soon as the State Duma commenced its work, a deputy inquiry was sent to the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation regarding the actions of the power structures in this case.

6) The task of weakening the Communist Party of the Russian Federation

The long-term task of the political wing of the Presidential Administration on the party front will be to weaken the Communist Party – the only full-fledged opposition party with a defined ideology, developed branches in the regions and access to independent sources of funding.

The political task of containing the growing popularity of the Communist Party among the population and its role as an “assemblage point” for those with oppositional leanings in the elections to the State Duma ultimately failed, although the election results (~19%) were within acceptable limits.

A number of groups within the Communist Party have been strengthened: a “systemic” lobbying link (relations with sponsors have for the most part been overseen by Deputy Chairman of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation V. Kashin; the Head of Rostec has his own pool in the party and faction leadership) and a “systemic” group of young leaders close to Yuri Afonin (First Deputy Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, who oversees the Party’s work with its regional branches – the shadow political wing of the Presidential Administration, as it were), as well as the “radical” wing of the “old” regional leaders in the Presidential Administration.

This will predetermine attempts to “purge” numerous branches of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, potentially going as far as **depriving a number of “radical” communists of their seats** for repeatedly taking part in unsanctioned protests.

ASPECTS OF THE POLITICAL GOVERNANCE OF THE WORK OF THE STATE DUMA AND KEY FACTIONS

The structure of the State Duma’s work, as well as that of its key faction United Russia, has become more complicated as a result of the elections.

There are a number of centres of influence within the United Russia faction when it comes to decision-making.

1) Strengthening the influence of the Presidential Administration’s political wing

Direct protégés of the political wing of the Presidential Administration who are close to the State Duma Chairperson were given key positions: First Deputy Chairperson of United Russia on Law-making (Dmitry Vyatkin was promoted to supervisor of law-making within the party; he has also received the seal of approval from the top brass in the Security Council), seats on several socio-political State Duma committees and deputy leaders of the United Russia faction. Members of the State Duma who have completed the Leaders of Russia programme will be loyal to the leadership of the Presidential Administration.

In addition, figures close to the leadership of the political wing of the Presidential Administration have assumed top positions in the **State Duma Commission on Regulations**, which will **monitor the discipline of members of the State Duma from all factions** and the material and economic support they receive.

2) Strengthening the United Russia leadership’s influence on the party’s work

The United Russia leadership has developed **closer connections** with the **leadership of the faction’s General Council**, which is headed by Andrei Turchak. A number of members of the State Duma close to him were appointed to the position of deputy head.

Immediately after the elections, the Presidium of the United Russia General Council proposed making the faction more accountable to the party leadership. The party’s Central Election Commission is also planning to step up its own supervisory activities over United Russia members and its annual rating system.

The political wing of the Presidential Administration and the leadership of the United Russia General Council may also increase their influence over the work of the United Russia faction in the State Duma through the activities of new party commissions (*see above*).

3) Maintaining independent positions within the United Russia leadership and other federal political groups of influence

The **Head of the United Russia faction, Vladimir Vasilyev** (who has close ties to the Security Council), remains an independent centre of influence, with his closest aide being promoted to the position of deputy head of the faction.

The post of Deputy Head of Administrative Activities – a **potentially** important position – was given to Vyacheslav Makarov, who is close friends with **Speaker of the Federation Council Valentina Matvienko**. But it is difficult to gauge how much influence he actually has at present: Makarov does not enjoy the best of relations with the leadership of the United Russia General Council and the party's Central Election Commission, and was effectively demoted to the State Duma from a more significant leadership position in the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg. His standing in the party is thus minimal at best.

4) The uncertainty surrounding the role of former Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev

It is not unthinkable that **party Chairman Dmitry Medvedev** will attempt to **become more involved in the work of the party and the faction** (as long as he retains his political position), despite the fact that the apparatus he currently heads is clearly at odds with the head of the United Russia General Council and the leadership of the Presidential Administration's political wing. The party is the last institutional mechanism for political positioning and working with the regions available to Medvedev "by virtue of his position" (the position of Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation does not provide such opportunities). He has no serious influence on the formation of the list of United Russia members of the State Duma or the party's election programme.

5) The waning influence of State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin

State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin has seen his influence on the work of the United Russia faction, and the State Duma as a whole, **weaken** compared to the previous convocation. Some members of his "group" of State Duma members were appointed deputy heads. "Volodin group" deputies have influence over the following State Duma committees that are important for the business community:

- › *The State Duma Committee on Control* (headed by Oleg Morozov; a number of members of the State Duma close to the Chairperson of the State Duma were appointed to the committee), **which may assume the role of main external (parliamentary) watchdog** for the adoption of bylaws by government agencies, as well as organize "government hours" in the State Duma.
- › In part, the *State Duma Committee on Labour, Social Policy and Veterans' Affairs* ("Volodin's group" within this committee will also be coordinated through the new Deputy Chairperson of the State Duma, former Ombudsman for Human Rights Anna Kuznetsova, a protégé of Volodin and the Russian Orthodox Church); the *State Duma Committee on Agrarian Issues*; and the *State Duma Committee on Transport and Transport Infrastructure Development*. These committees are full of members of the State Duma who are believed to be close to the Chairperson of the State Duma. Volodin also has a number of friends in the *State Duma Committee on Budget and Taxes*.
- › The former head of the faction and new Deputy Chairperson *Sergey Neverov*, Volodin's closest political ally, will be able to **coordinate key industry-specific committees**, specifically the *State Duma Committee on Industry and Trade*, the *State Duma Committee on Transport and Transport Infrastructure Development*, and the *State Duma Committee on Construction and Housing*.

Volodin and members of the State Duma loyal to him will likely continue to be targets of informational and political pressure campaigns, in which the political wing and the Presidential Administration and the leadership of the United Russia party have a vested interest.

At the same time, Vyacheslav Volodin is likely to develop interaction with Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and key deputy prime ministers.

In addition, in the absence of stable, constructive interaction within the political wing of the Presidential Administration with the leaders of the “old” parties, the growing popularity of the Communist Party and its increasing protest potential, we can expect Volodin, an experienced politician, to act as a moderator in the Federal government’s relations with the “old” opposition parties.

APPENDIX 1. INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC COMMITTEES IN THE STATE DUMA THAT FOLLOW THE “ONE COMMITTEE PER MINISTRY” FORMULA

1) The new **State Duma Committee on Industry and Trade**, designated to the leader of the “Rostec group,” Vladimir Gutenev. This is a large committee made up of many high-profile members of the State Duma. Almost all key federal industrial groups are represented (Rostec more than any other group). It is attached to the **Ministry of Industry and Trade**, whose management also belongs to the “Rostec group.”

2) The new **State Duma Committee on Transport and Transport Infrastructure Development**. It is not so much the committee’s connections with the **Ministry of Transport** that will determine the committee’s role in the management and development of transport infrastructure as its ties with the office of **Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin**, who oversees the Ministry of Transport and personally coordinates the development of the transport infrastructure in the Russian regions.

The committee now includes an increased number of members of the State Duma, representing road construction, Roscosmos State Corporation and Russian Railways.

3) The enlarged **State Duma Committee on Construction and Housing**, which falls within the remit of **Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin** and the **Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities** that is loyal to him (construction, housing and utilities issues were previously assigned to different committees). United Russia regained control of the committee when Sergei Pakhomov was named its new head (he is considered to be part of the team led by current Governor of Moscow Region Andreiy Vorobyov and former Minister of Construction, Housing and Utilities Mikhail Men).

The State Duma, and the State Duma Committee on Construction and Housing in general, have large numbers of representatives from major construction companies in Moscow and the bigger regions, as well as former city mayors. Real estate developers and public utilities companies from Tatarstan (a pivotal region for Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin) are also well represented.

A **State Duma commission for the protection of citizens’ housing rights** is being set up under the head of the previous State Duma Committee on Construction and Housing Galina Khovanskaya from A Just Russia. The commission will try to act as a counterbalance for **construction industry lobbyists** on issues of homeowner rights in projects for the “integrated development of Russian territories,” price hikes for housing and communal services and relaxing requirements for developers of social infrastructure.

4) The **State Duma Committee on Labour, Social Policy and Veterans’ Affairs**. Despite initiatives to break the committee up, it has nevertheless survived as a single group under the leadership of Yaroslav Nilov (the Liberal Democratic Party), who is well liked in the government’s social bloc.

However, the committee does not wield the same kind of influence it once did and this is reflected in its size and composition. The current leadership of the **Ministry of Labour and Social Protection** managed to block the appointment of its former minister Maxim Topilin as head of the committee. The committee is dominated by representatives of traditional trade unions and the “Volodin group.”

5) The new **State Duma Committee on Economic Policy** headed by former Minister of Labour and Social Protection Maxim Topilin (a compromise appointment to prevent the former minister taking on a more suitable social committee).

The committee is made up of key federal groups of influence (the “Rostec group,” the “group of former Minister of Industry Viktor Khristenko and Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova,” the “Rosatom group,” the head of the political wing of the Presidential Administration and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs). The members of the committee are likely to be **fairly critical** of the current leadership of the **Ministry of Economic Development** – the key department on the committee’s agenda.

6) The new ***State Duma Committee on Small and Medium Enterprises***. The committee has moved away from the New People party, which is focused on the entrepreneurship development agenda, and was created at the initiative of the political wing of the Presidential Administration and the “Kovalchuk group” and controlled by businessman Andrei Nechaev (the committee is headed up by Alexander Dyomin, employed at Nechaev’s Captains Fund and teacher of a course entitled “Captains of Business” at Plekhanov Russian University of Economics). Representatives of the “Rosatom” group hold great political influence within the committee, which is attached to the **Ministry of Economic Development**.

7) The new ***State Duma Committee on Safeguarding Competition***, formed under one of the key members of the State Duma and sponsor of the “old” A Just Russia party, Valery Gartung (whose influence in the party diminished following its reform, carried out under the watchful eye of the Presidential Administration). The committee is likely to partner with the **Federal Antimonopoly Service** in matters of safeguarding competition (or rather in the creation of a preferential regime for domestic and localized suppliers). It is currently the smallest committee in the State Duma.

8) The ***State Duma Committee on Financial Markets*** remains unchanged under the head of the Association of Regional Banks of Russia Anatoly Aksakov (part of A Just Russia’s quota). The committee (and its head) is the main partner of the **Bank of Russia** management. The **Ministry of Finance** is the second key regulator.

The number of representatives of large private banks (Alfa-Bank) and the financial institutions of state corporations (Rostec Group, Rotenberg Group) in the State Duma Committee has grown.

Some new members of the State Duma from non-banking financial organizations and the sports betting industry were given positions in the *State Duma Committee on Sport and Physical Culture*.

9) The ***State Duma Committee on Energy***. The committee continues to be dominated by representatives of the traditional energy sector and Pavel Zavalniy was kept on as its head (he comes from the gas industry). Key oil and gas corporations, hydro and nuclear energy companies and power grid operators are represented on the committee. There are also a few lobbyists for “green” energy. The committee is attached to the **Ministry of Energy** and Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

10) The ***State Duma Committee on Agrarian Issues***, whose political clout increased during the previous convocation of the State Duma thanks to the work of Deputy Chairperson of the State Duma Alexey Gordeyev (who previously served as Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Prime Minister). V. Kashin (part of the Communist Party’s “systemic” wing who oversees work with party sponsors), who is well liked in the **Ministry of Agriculture**, retained his position as head of the committee to make up the Communist Party’s “quota.” The Committee was replenished with lobbyists for the Agro-Industrial Complex, the tobacco industry and supporters of toughening requirements for retailers in their relations with food suppliers.

11) The ***State Duma Committee on Development of Far East and Arctic***, which has been adapted to better reflect the work of the **Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic**. “Political” issues of regional policy have been moved to the State Duma Committee on Regional Policy and Local Self-Government). Nikolay Kharitonov retained his position as head of the committee, thus fulfilling the Communist Party’s “quota.”

12) The new ***State Duma Committee on Health Protection*** remains unchanged. Dmitry Khubezov (a health official from Ryazan) was named new leader of the committee thanks to his connections with Chief Physician and supervisor of the new United Russia party commission Denis Protsenko (a member of Sobyenin’s “group”).

The committee has traditionally comprised public sector regional health officials and chief physicians. However, it now includes representatives of pharmaceutical manufacturers and commercial clinics as well (some members of the State Duma from the dietary supplements sphere and the pharmacy sector are involved in other committees). The committee is attached to the **Ministry of Health**, the **Federal Medical-Biological Agency**, the **Federal**

Service for Surveillance in Healthcare and, in some areas, the **Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing**, which answer directly to the government.

13–14) The State Duma Committee on Science and Education has been split into two committees to reflect the ongoing division of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education into the **Ministry of Science** (dealing with universities and research institutes) and the **Ministry of Education** (dealing with preschool and school education).

The **State Duma Committee on Science and Higher Education** was set up under the supervision of Sergey Kabyshev, an expert in constitutional law who served as a member of Vladimir Putin’s election team (Kabyshev is employed at Kutafin Moscow State Law University and, in terms of party affiliation, represents the A Just Russia party). The **State Duma Committee on Education** is led by Oksana Kazakova (United Russia; she previously headed up the State Duma Committee on Culture).

APPENDIX 2. INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC COMMITTEES IN THE STATE DUMA WITH A COMPLEX SYSTEM OF INTERACTION WITH MINISTRIES NOT UNDER THE “ONE COMMITTEE PER MINISTRY” FORMULA

1) The new ***State Duma Committee on Ownership, Land and Property Relations***. Making up part of the Communist Party’s quota, the committee was headed up by party member Sergei Gavrilov, who had run the committee previously, in 2011–2016 (he has close ties with the VTB and Rostec “groups” and the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church). Its main partners are the **Ministry of Economic Development**, the **Federal Service for State Registration, Cadastre and Cartography**, which in the new structure of the Cabinet of Ministers is directly subordinate to the government, and the **Federal Agency for State Property Management**, which answers to the **Ministry of Finance**.

2) The new “super committee”: the ***State Duma Committee on Ecology, Natural Resources and Environment Protection***, formed under Dmitry Kobylkin (who was previously the Head of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug and also served as Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, and was considered by many during his time working in the region to have close ties to Novatek).

The committee’s work corresponds with the area of responsibility of **Deputy Prime Minister Viktoria Abramchenko**, the **Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment** and the **Federal Service for Supervision of Natural Resources**.

In addition, climate policy issues will go through the committee and will be overseen in the government by the **Ministry of Economic Development** and **First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov**. The committee includes members of the State Duma who are involved in environmental protection, as well as representatives of commodities companies, the garbage industry and Russian Railways.

3) There was talk of breaking the ***State Duma Committee on Informational Policy, Technologies and Communications*** into smaller committees, but any plans in this direction were evidently scrapped. The committee works within the same sphere of competencies as the **Ministry of Finance** and the **Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media**.

In reality, the main agenda of the committee is set by the competing lines of the Presidential Administration’s **information** and **political wings**, which oversee “traditional” and “new” media (including the internet), respectively.

The committee retained key members of the State Duma from both blocs, although it has shrunk in size and prestige. Alexander Khinshtein managed to hold on to his position as head of the committee, despite his disagreements with the Russian Orthodox Church and the IT industry.

A direct representative of the IT industry joined the committee, as did representatives of the relevant law enforcement agencies, while a number of State Duma deputies with ties to the industry were placed on other committees.

4) The revamped ***State Duma Committee on Regional Policy and Local Self-Government***, which, notably does not include “federal relations” in its title (against the background of the further centralization of the power structure following the adoption of amendments to the Constitution and key laws on its development).

As before, the committee is headed up by Alexei Didenko, representing the Liberal Democratic Party. Formally, the **Ministry of Economic Development** serves as its associated federal executive body. However, regional development issues are limited within the Cabinet of Ministers to **Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin** as the head of the government commission on regional development, as well as to the **Ministry of Finance** as the main financial body of the government of the Russian Federation.

The **political wing** of the Presidential Administration will also greatly influence the committee's agenda on matters regarding the obligations of regional leaders and the further integration of local self-governing bodies into the state power structure, as will Mayor of Moscow **Sergey Sobyenin**, as an informal leader of the State Council – the main platform for developing initiatives on regional development issues.

5) The new **State Duma Committee on Tourism and Tourism Infrastructure**. The allocation of State Duma members to this committee is a response to the growing importance of **Rostourism** in the new government following the dissolution of the Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs.

Formally, the **Ministry of Economic Development** is the main federal executive body in charge of the tourism agenda (although functionally it takes a back seat), while **Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin's** team is responsible for tourism infrastructure development.

The committee includes members of the State Duma from key tourist centres (the southern regions of Russia and Altai Territory), as well as high-ranking members of the Presidential Administration's political wing. It is headed up by television producer and New Party representative Sangadzhi Tarbaev.

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