



EUROPEAN CONCEPTUAL HISTORY

# Parliament and Parliamentarism

A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF A EUROPEAN CONCEPT

Edited by **Pasi Ihalainen** • **Cornelia Ilie** • **Kari Palonen**



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NEW YORK • OXFORD  
[www.berghahnbooks.com](http://www.berghahnbooks.com)

Tarschys, D. 1990. 'Regeringens styrformer', in *Att styra riket: regeringskansliet 1840–1990*. Stockholm: Allmänna Förlaget, pp. 222–46.

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## Chapter 7

# The Conceptual History of the Russian State Duma

*Irène Herrmann*



On 27 April 2011, a major international conference took place at the Tauride Palace in St Petersburg to celebrate the 105th anniversary of the Russian State Duma. This event, and its timing, is extremely interesting since this celebration did not mark 'an actual centenary'. The chairman of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov (2011), acknowledged this fact himself. One is led to infer that it was organized specifically to transmit political messages to the audience and the Russian citizenry at large, and three of these messages seem particularly relevant.

The most obvious message was the indisputably close link between the first Imperial Duma and its modern counterpart. Not only was this connection expressed through the date and location of the celebration, which occurred exactly at the same place and on the same day as the opening of the first Duma, but it was also vehemently stressed by the various orators, in whose view there was no doubt that the imperial institution was the direct ancestor of its post-Soviet homonym. In fact, the event was even labelled the '105th anniversary of Russian parliamentarism' (Deklaraciya 2011).

For most commentators of this event, the first Imperial Duma itself had very ancient roots. They linked its existence and democratic endeavours to medieval and early modern, supposedly deliberative assemblies, such as the Veche (Ponomaryov 1988), the Zemsky Sobor or the Boyars' Duma. The orators' (not necessarily conscious) purpose was twofold: to stress the purported length of the Russian democratic tradition, and then in turn to disqualify any foreign political legacy. In other words, by establishing an historical continuity between various Russian representative institutions they created a truly Russian sort of (exercise in) democracy.

Within this framework, or so the second message went, the Duma was considered a true (lower house of) parliament, and its creation the true starting point of Russian parliamentarism. However, this very parliamentarism was considered not only compatible with the classical tradition of Western parliaments but also best suited for the specific case of Russia. In other words, the third message forcefully suggested that Russian parliamentarism was special (Stenograph, 22 April 2011). The specificity of the Russian democratic institutions was altogether proven and mirrored by the concepts that the Chairman of the Duma, Boris Gryzlov, used and explained in his jubilee speech. He mentioned Russia's current 'sovereign democracy' as a mere translation of its far older *Samoderjavnoe narodovlaste* – i.e., autocratic people's self-determination (Shkel' 2011). This concept sounded truly old and authentic. More importantly, the very use of the old Slavic word 'Duma' simultaneously underlined the intrinsic differences between Russian and foreign parliaments and expressed both the Duma's comparability and its uniqueness.

From the perspective of the conceptual history of parliaments, this ambiguity is extremely telling and fascinating. Globally, it raises three sorts of issues, firstly pertaining to the history of the Duma and the remains of the tsarist autocratic regime in the present Duma. Secondly, issues related to its compatibility with the present-day Western general acceptance of what a true parliament should be like, encompassing the way it fits the criteria of representation, deliberation, sovereignty and responsibility as formulated in the starting hypothesis of this volume. Finally, issues concerning the perception of the Duma and how it is influenced by the word that designates it. Let us start with the history of the Duma.

### Power(lessness) from the Tsars to the Soviets

In order to give his manifold message any effectiveness, Gryzlov had to conceal several historical elements, three of which might seriously have weakened his argumentation and hence its expected positive political effect. He did not mention that the name of the Duma was not a consensual one, guided by the desire to continue and improve the legacy of the Imperial Duma. Actually, its name was the result of a linguistic fashion and an historical compromise between two contradictory, parliamentary and Soviet-style forms of representation (*Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, 1987–91).

From the end of the 1980s onwards, several assemblies, be they gatherings of citizens (*Moskovskie Novosti*, 19 November 1989), political institutions (*Izvestia*, 29 January 1990) or even newspapers (*Pravda*, 5 April 1990), called

themselves Dumas, without it meaning any specific form of organization, let alone a decision-making organ. At the very beginning of the 1990s, the political actors who wanted a new parliament for the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) thus rather smoothly and logically adopted the same word to designate the lower house (Rumanciev 2007–09, 1: 145, 377; 2: 354).

In any case, and unlike Gryzlov, they were careful not to underline any close link between the old imperial institution and the post-Soviet parliament that they wanted to establish. Their discretion seems puzzling as the political use of history is one of the best ways to legitimize the introduction of novelties (Herrmann 2011: 13–14), and the Russian audience was enthusiastically rediscovering its imperial past (Ferretti 2002; Scherrer 2006). Actually, their silence reflects the embarrassment caused by the political struggle between the promoters of parliaments and the defenders of soviets; it also mirrored the internal uneasiness of most social actors, who were unwilling to deny their entire communist past for a new capitalist future, and it was admittedly also influenced by the bad reputation the Imperial Duma had in Soviet society (*Izvestia*, 7 June 1989).

The third edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (1969–78), which is a valuable source of mainstream information for the end of the Soviet era, notably depicted the Imperial Duma as a powerless institution that merely aimed to support a 'bourgeois monarchy'. Despite its indisputable ideological bias, the article was not totally wrong, and it quite rightly stressed the decisive role played by the events of the year 1905, when the defeat against Japan and the Revolution compelled Tsar Nicholas II to make several political concessions, including the creation of a State Duma (see also the case of Finland in Chapter 6). Unlike the older institutions bearing the same name, the new State Duma was a parliament-like organ in that it was elected and had the power to enact laws.

That being said, like the Boyar Dumas and, later on, the municipal Dumas and the contemporary German Reichstag, the State Duma had only restricted power or, more to the point, only the amount of power the monarch allowed it. The emperor had the right to appoint his ministers, to veto the laws issued by the Duma and to dissolve the Duma itself whenever he wanted to. This situation rapidly led to conflicts, and after the dissolution of two Dumas, Nicholas II tamed his 'legislature' by astutely settling the problem of representation that had long been discussed during the nineteenth century (Semyonov 2009a, 2009b). As of 1907, the elections took place in a 'curial' way, allotting deputies according to the voters' 'estate': while 120,000 workers could elect one deputy, it required only 230 landowners to achieve the same result (Kyr'yanov 2006).



In 1917, the situation understandably changed. Given the February Revolution and especially the abdication of the emperor, several members of the Duma formed a provisional government with the intention of assuming power and organizing the transition to a true constitutional regime. The very progressive laws that it issued were hardly implemented, since the provisional government's power was decisively challenged by another institution: the Petrograd Soviet. Like the State Duma, the latter was created in the wake of the Revolution of 1905 out of strike committees and, like the provisional government, it was (re)activated as a result of the First Revolution of 1917. Now, it operated according to totally different principles and quickly became an example to emulate, purportedly (or supposedly) building on the models of soviets formed during the Paris Commune.

The soviets were (at least ideally) spontaneous gatherings that elected their representatives to meet at a superior level while retaining the imperative mandate and the power to recall them, thereby removing the possibilities for independent deliberation. More importantly, there was no separation of powers. Cooperation with the provisional government was thus difficult and became impossible after the Bolsheviks seized power, gradually adopting the exclusive political model of soviets and disseminating it throughout the (communist) world. According to Lenin's quite consistent views, parliaments were to be used for propaganda and to challenge the bourgeois system from within. In Russia, parliamentarism had been temporarily maintained to show the 'backward classes' its true character: ensuring the power of the rich while pretending to care for the concerns of the poor. Only this experience could convince the workers and peasants of the superiority of soviets (Lenin 1920). Within this theoretical framework, Soviet institutions unsurprisingly showed no obvious (or at least no consciously assumed) sign of parliamentarism.

This does not mean, however, that the Soviet system totally differed from the Duma. From a practical point of view, the soviets, whatever their level, were directed by the party, so their real power was almost non-existent. They were mere symbolic decorations, just as the Duma had once been. At a higher level of abstraction, both the capitalist and communist regimes shared some common concerns. They notably wanted their respective systems to function and consequently to be supported by the majority of their citizens. This is why the 'parliamentarization' of Soviet politics began before the fall of the USSR and even before parliamentarism had ceased to be considered one of the main hallmarks of the regime's arch-enemy. Conversely, it also explains why the creation of a parliamentary institution was seen as particularly vital once the Soviet Union had collapsed. From this perspective, the Duma was not only a political tool but also the symbol of an ideological change, although

its reintroduction seemed to be more of an (admittedly abrupt) evolution than a real break with the past.

### Representation from Gorbachev to Yeltsin

When Gorbachev came into power in 1985, he analysed the poor economic situation as being the indirect result of civic disengagement. His reflection led him to open up public debate and leave unprecedented space for the expression of political opinions and knowledge. In addition, he launched several political reforms aimed at opposing corruption and reviving the citizens' interest in politics: the famous policy of *perestroika*. Both programmes included better political representation.

The first of these programmes clearly opposed Brezhnev's legacy. In order to gain uncontested support, the latter had given more power to regional elites. In the early 1980s, it was thought that the aging and almighty local elites would paralyse any attempt to develop the country. Gorbachev proceeded to replace them and established new political actors; however, while these were rather young, dynamic and more in touch with the people's concerns, they were fortuitously mostly Russian as Gorbachev paid no real attention to their nationality (Lapidus 1989: 92–108).

The second programme was even more ambitious, as it encompassed the reform of the ruling political system. These fundamental changes occurred in two main interconnected stages, respectively focusing on the redefinition of the role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the reshaping of the Soviet Union's deliberative organs. In January 1987, Gorbachev launched the policy of *demokratisaciya* (democratization), aimed at revitalizing the party by challenging its old sclerotic ruling elite. He accordingly called for multi-candidate elections to take place for the Communist Party in the localities and the soviets. In June 1988, he gave this programme more publicity and increased its effect. A more decisive step was taken in early 1990, when Section 6 of the 1977 constitution, which stipulated the leading role of the CPSU, was replaced by a new version that guaranteed multipartyism (Constitution 1977).

This radical change took place and was especially effective in the context of Gorbachev's power reorganization. In order to challenge the 'old communist guard', the first secretary had also decided to change the old structures and, on 1 July 1988, launched the so-called Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union (Gorbachev 1988), a 2,250-member body whose function was to elect the Supreme Soviet. Although it was meant to revive the old system of soviets and actually added an additional stage in the designation process of the Soviet legislative assembly, some observers consider it to

have been a parliamentary-like assembly (Magun 2007: 66ff). It did acquire some of the power formerly devolved to the party and gained better control of the executive. Also, its sessions were supposed to last several months, which allowed for true discussions. Above all, two thirds of its members were elected by the people from among several candidates of different political persuasions.

According to a well-known historical mechanism, the result of the first election, in March 1989, displayed vast support for Gorbachev and his moderate reformism; however, the election of the new Congresses of People's Deputies at the federal level, on 4 March 1990, showed that within one year different forms of opposition had coalesced and all those who had lost their trust in Gorbachev started to back other political forces such as the so-called Radical Reformists or the Nationalists. The latter had gained influence notably because of the growing dissatisfaction with the Russian elites installed by Gorbachev in his fight against corruption. Multipartyism ultimately supported this trend and provided the Nationalists' claim for independence with an official basis.

There had been more and more nationalist movements and demonstrations from 1986 onwards, and they had gradually intensified. In this process, the election of the local Congresses of People's Deputies acted as a powerful trigger for nationalistic forces by inciting an increasing number of republics to declare independence from the Soviet power. This process mainly concerned peripheral regions, such as the Baltic States (1990) and Georgia, but it also appealed to the newly elected Russian authorities and especially their leader, Boris Yeltsin, who, in the summer of 1990, declared his republic's independence in a nationalistic and demagogic way. In June 1991, he even became Russia's first elected president, not least in order to challenge Mikhail Gorbachev.

The latter took several steps to preserve his power and the supremacy of the Soviet Union. He sent troops to the Baltic States and held a referendum to display the support he enjoyed, but he was also forced to prepare a new Union Treaty that yielded a large degree of autonomy to the republics. One day before its signature, Soviet conservatives decided to pre-empt the event by seizing power. Yeltsin played a key role in the failure of this coup and instantaneously gained enormous popularity as a result. His newfound fame allowed him to supersede Gorbachev, who resigned in December 1991, just as the collapse of the Soviet Union was officially ratified.

The irony is that Gorbachev's introduction of novel electoral rules and better representation into the ossified Soviet structures had decisively worked against him, his projects and even the preservation of the USSR. It allowed long-restrained nationalisms to reappear on the political agenda and to seduce

not only national minorities but also a huge Russian majority that followed Yeltsin's wishes to build a Russian state on the still-smouldering ruins of the Soviet Union. That being said, while Yeltsin's 'dissolving [of] the Soviet Union may have been his most important achievement' (McFaul 2000: 50), much remained to be done with regard to the parliamentarization of the new country.

### Responsibility under Yeltsin

At first, there was genuine interest in laying down democratic rules for Russia. From 1990 onwards, at a time when there was still no Russian state, a constitutional commission gathered to provide the country with new legislative institutions (Fond konstitucionnykh reform 1990–93). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when its work was becoming crucial, serious rifts appeared among its members regarding the way this restructuring was to be managed, the degree of centralization and the respective powers of the legislative and the executive.

In this debate, Yeltsin first advocated a balance of power that was not that unfavourable to the projected parliament (Moore 1995). During the process of constitutional elaboration, the Congress of People's Deputies gave its president extraordinary powers. He was thus able to launch decisive economic reforms, which he considered more important than any political reorganization. If this conviction prevented him from authoritarian moves, it also prevented him from developing new institutions that would have unfailingly backed him. Sometime after the liberalization of prices, in January 1992, the Congress of People's Deputies opposed most of Yeltsin's suggestions as a result of an increasing distrust of his economic reforms, rendering the president unable to prevail and eventually leaving the Russian Federation ungovernable.

This outcome stemmed (at least partly) from the unresolved question of responsibility. Although this issue was mentioned during constitutional discussions (Rumanciev 2007–09, 1: 786), it was not clearly solved: Yeltsin apparently understood his extraordinary powers to mean that he had *carte blanche* to act as he wished, while the Congress still considered itself to be above the president. As of the end of 1992, this struggle for pre-eminence developed into a fierce conflict that resorted to constitutional tools, such as referenda or declarations of unconstitutionality, before eventually making use of real weapons. In the autumn of 1993, violence broke out against the background of a severe economic crisis. MPs called for their supporters to storm the Moscow television tower. The next day, Yeltsin replied by having troops open fire on what was considered to be the Russian parliament.<sup>1</sup> In doing so,

he showed the entire world how little responsibility the government had vis-à-vis the parliament.

This turn of events had several consequences for the new parliamentary institutions created by Yeltsin to replace the Congress. In fact, the very necessity of their existence, their global character and denomination had long been decided by the above-mentioned constitutional commission. The commission had supported a bicameral system right from the start and agreed very early on that the lower chamber should be named the 'Duma' (Rumanciev 2007-09, 2: 406). The 1993 coup decisively shaped the institution, notably on issues pertaining to responsibility. On one hand, the violent outbreak convinced Yeltsin to strengthen the government's power over the new parliament. For instance, the President was given the right to dissolve the Duma. He could also initiate/veto legislation or issue decrees with the force of law. Moreover, since he was not constitutionally required to choose his government from the parliamentary majority, the Duma did not bear any responsibility for the country's policy (Remington 2008: 111).

On the other hand, possibly because of the demonstrations of democratic goodwill that Yeltsin was compelled to display – after all, he was backed by the Russian democratic forces and even more so by most of the Western states – the Duma was not entirely powerless. Its 450 members were elected in a fairly democratic way, by a system combining proportional/majority representation, which gave it indisputable legitimacy. It also enjoyed several rights that constitute a true parliament: it issued laws (which had to be ratified by the upper house), and the individual chosen as prime minister had to be approved by it. It could rely on several additional tools such as the Audit Chamber or the right to organize hearings and even to impeach the president. In short, the Duma could remind the president that he was accountable to his parliament.

In the context of painful economic changes, the war in Chechnya and, above all, the lack of a majority in parliament, the first Dumas often used their power to challenge the president, and from 1998 to 1999 the Duma initiated an impeachment procedure against Boris Yeltsin.<sup>2</sup> This decision was obviously spectacular and possibly dangerous, as the president could have responded with legally sanctioned violence, as he had in similar circumstances in 1993. This time, though, he did not do so and instead agreed to resign peacefully at the end of the millennium. The Duma's impeachment procedure was indeed first and foremost a symbolic reminder: despite all the public gesticulations, Yeltsin and the Duma had been able to cooperate, manage the Soviet legacy and initiate the country's democratization and parliamentarization (Remington 2008: 118) in a way that is tellingly reflected in the notion of deliberation.

## Deliberation from Yeltsin to Putin

The Duma and the Congress of People's Deputies were both undoubtedly considered true loci of deliberation. It is thus not really surprising that the constitution of 1993 provided for three readings at the Duma, although the discussions had probably not been expected to be so animated and acerbated; at first, the lower house was a place of sometimes violent disputes that ignored true parliamentary discourse, and personal attacks, directed less at a member's political ideas and stance than at his or her past or origins, occurred often enough. On 23 December 1994, the deputy of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (a far-right patriotic party) E.Ju. Loginov tellingly complained: 'I protest against . . . the accusation of anti-Semitism. Tomorrow, some person with schizophrenia will accuse me of zoophilia or eating babies'.<sup>3</sup> He received the following answer: 'If he [Loginov] is not an anti-Semite, then I am [the famous Soviet prima ballerina] Maya Plisetskaya'.<sup>4</sup> The parliamentary rhetoric nonetheless improved progressively, and by the turn of the millennium unparliamentary discourse had become rare.

This evolution may have had various causes. Firstly, the changing attitudes within the Duma may be seen as evidence of Russian democratization. In most parliamentary systems, the use of adequate discursive techniques shows the integration of a code of dispute resolution that attempts to respect the view of one's opponent. It would seem only natural for Russian parliamentarism to follow in the same tracks. Indeed, the mastering of such parliamentary discourse coincided with the introduction of new institutional rules that were at least officially meant to enhance the Russian legislative system.

In 2000, newly in power, Putin launched significant reforms in the functioning of Russian federalism and hence the upper house of parliament. The 1993 constitution was silent on how to choose the two deputies who were to represent their 'subject' (administrative regions or members of the federation) in the Federation Council, so that as of 1995 this position was held by the heads of the local executive and legislative organs. In order to officially avoid these dual mandates and better respect the separation of power, Putin decided that the members had to be full-time representatives. Although the latter were supposed to be designated by their regions, the process of designation was actually mostly supervised by Moscow. The Kremlin's monitoring strengthened in 2004 following its adoption of an antiterrorist and anti-corruption law stipulating that the governors of the subjects would not be elected by local voters but appointed by the government itself (Remington 2008: 121).

At approximately the same time, in the wake of the terrorist attack on Beslan, the wave of reforms also reached the lower house. Here again,

changes were officially presented as being in the interest of democracy. It was decided that the Duma would be exclusively elected by proportional representation, which actually prevented all typically regional and/or independent candidates from sitting in parliament. Furthermore, all candidates had to be party members, even as it was becoming increasingly difficult for parties to obtain an official status, as the authorities allegedly feared fantasy candidatures (Patzke 2011: 166). Finally, the minimum threshold for any party to be represented in parliament rose from 5 to 7 per cent. This measure was officially meant to strengthen the party system by reducing the number of parties (Stone 2009: 21–22).

The result of these decisions was indeed remarkable. The number of parties sank from eleven in 1993 to four in 2007 and 2011. More importantly, the absence of independent candidates strikingly reduced the ideological diversity of the lower house and consequently the richness of its debates. This trend had admittedly older conceptual roots. Already in 1994, some MPs had claimed that the Duma sessions were not meant for political debates (Stenographs, 13 January 1994; 19 January 1994). This point of view was somehow reiterated a decade later by Gryzlov himself; however, it took another four years for journalists and the public sphere to comment on the chairman's alleged utterance that the Duma was not being a place for discussion. This commentary reveals that around 2007 parts of Russian society started to feel and resent the undemocratic evolution of the Duma. At least since 2007, the novel rhetorical discipline displayed by the deputies has had little to do with democracy and more to do with the hidden agenda of democratization and the evolution of the Duma's sovereignty.

### Sovereignty from Putin to Medvedev

The Duma's sovereignty has never been that of a classical parliament. Although the lower chamber's sovereignty was obviously crucial for the first MPs, they did not compare it with Western standards but with their Soviet, pre-perestroika legacy (Stenographs, 20 May 1994). This reference allowed Yeltsin to give the Duma a little leeway vis-à-vis the executive power, which he did mainly in order to avoid it having any resemblance with the Congress of People's Deputies that he had come to hate so much. That being said, such an interpretation is only partially true as this policy continued despite the change of president and the blossoming economy from the early 2000s on. Putin did not alter the previous trend. In fact, all his democratizing measures had self-reinforcing side effects. Under the cover of Western parliamentary ideals, these measures favoured the president's party and control within and over the Duma. Putin's new 'democratic' rules of the game excluded all

minor parties and typically local candidates; the designation of governors of the subjects was a way to control the Duma indirectly. Even the shift from semi-direct to entirely proportional representation occurred in a media landscape that was dominated by his party, so that his electoral reform was only a means to dominate the political arena even more (Patzke 2011: 196ff). Under the cover of democratization, the Duma could no longer meet all the criteria that constitute a true parliament.

Admittedly, Medvedev undertook to improve this situation. As soon as Putin handed over power to him in 2008, the new president showed a willingness to distance himself from his mentor prime minister by adopting pro-parliament measures. He notably re-established the threshold of 5 per cent and facilitated the registration of parties; however, on most points, such as the appointment of governors of the subjects, he shared his predecessor's views. Moreover, he extended the length of term of office in the Duma from four to five years. Above all, he actively contributed to the blurring of the separation of executive and legislative powers by allowing Putin to head 'United Russia', the overwhelmingly dominant party in the Duma, at the same time as the latter chaired the cabinet of ministers.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of Putin's and Medvedev's policy on the parliament, the Duma lost (almost) all of its sovereignty and became a mere 'house of approval' (Remington 2008: 126). Accordingly, it no longer played its institutional role. Most political decisions were made before being submitted to the Duma by people who had little to do with it. The Duma was reduced to a rather decorative rubber-stamping role. The latter criticism has been levelled ever since Putin took power if not before (Meier and Zarakhovich 2000), and it has even become more noticeable since 2005 with the Duma's increasing loss of sovereignty. Indeed, Russian citizens even contributed to the trend by massively voting for the government party.

Such an attitude has not gone unnoticed. Most authors have attributed it to the enhancement of the economic situation, which the ever-rising prices of hydrocarbons from the beginning of the new millennium have made possible. Some scholars have also stressed other causes, such as the fear of terrorism, the excesses of the so-called 'Yeltsinian' democracy or merely the lack of a true political alternative (Stone 2009; Colton and Hale 2009). These explanations all seem plausible and even confirmed a contrario by the demonstrations that took place in December 2011 after the election of the sixth post-Soviet Duma. The new middle-class generation that had emerged was asking for more than economic and physical security. Thousands of Russian citizens could then show their discontent publicly, but their demands did not focus on the Duma. The only parliamentary issue of note that these demonstrators indirectly tackled was that of representation, as they demanded



new and fair elections and better representation of the opposition parties. As for the actual functioning of parliament encompassing the notions of responsibility, deliberation and even sovereignty, it was hardly ever mentioned.

Admittedly, the people's silence on this may have stemmed from a conviction that better representation would progressively lead to functional enhancements. One may also argue that the demonstrators did not believe that the Duma per se needed immediate changes and that there were more important issues at stake. These suppositions are not contradictory; instead they suggest that the Duma, despite the timing of the demonstrations, was not a top priority.

### Conclusion

Against all odds, the political demonstrations that took place in early December 2011 indirectly and unwillingly confirmed some claims made about eight months earlier during the celebration of the 105th anniversary of the Duma. The very fact that they did not demand radical democratic improvements in the Duma – whatever the reasons for their silence might be – suggests that they agreed with Gryzlov or, at least, did not consider it a true Western-style parliament. Of course, it may be that they did not see the shortcomings of the Duma or care about them. Most probably, though, their attitude also expressed their belief that this institution did not really or immediately need to fit Western parliamentary criteria, as it was a specifically Russian version of parliament. In other words, they somehow shared Gryzlov's repeatedly asserted belief in the genuine 'national' character of the Russian political system.

If the demonstrations that followed the 2011 election did not deny the specificity of the Russian case per se, they took place after gross electoral frauds in Russia had been manifested to the entire world (*Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe* 2012). Hence, one must infer that the people understandingly did not want to be labelled as stupid by their own government and, consequently, did not want their specificity to consist in being credulous. They obviously felt ridiculed, and their mass reaction sheds light on the role they assigned to their parliament. Judging by the slogans of December 2011, the Duma was supposed to play first and foremost a highly symbolic role. It was not meant to represent the population so much as to show the world and themselves that the population was taken into account.

This statement has at least two – historical and conceptual – consequences. It suggests that Gryzlov's reference to history was both unexpectedly and indirectly right. The specific, and mostly symbolic, understanding of the

role of the current Duma is highly reminiscent of the Imperial Duma, as the early twentieth-century deputies were both powerless and emblematic of the Tsar's goodwill. In other words, the link between both Dumas was maybe not their specific (non-)parliamentarian functioning, as Gryzlov inaccurately claimed, but rather their particular function of dignifying Russian society. When the Kremlin ignored this minimal but by no means negligible expectation, the population felt humiliated and clearly neglected.

From this perspective, the demonstrations would indicate that the understanding of the Duma's history influenced Russian society. While the past was variously interpreted and hence given different weight by different social actors, its importance was indubitably reinforced by the use of the very word 'Duma'. Moreover, the term not only designed but also moulded the concept by generating understandings and expectations that were not exactly parliamentarily oriented but nonetheless strong. Apparently, the concept of the Duma comes across as a specific expression of the population's fundamental wish to be taken into consideration, of which the concept of parliament then appears to be another formulation.

### Notes

- 1 The death toll has yet to be agreed upon.
- 2 This procedure lasted roughly from June 1998 until May 1999 (sources: Stenographs).
- 3 'Я выражаю протест ... (Алла Гербер) обвинила меня в антисемитских высказываниях. Завтра какой-нибудь шизофреник ... обвинит меня в зоофилии или поедании младенцев' (Stenographs, 23 December 1994).
- 4 'Если он не антисемит, то я вообще тогда Майя Плисецкая', А.А. Osovsov, Fraction Russia's Choice (reformists) (Stenographs, 23 December 1994).
- 5 Significantly enough, the 29 April 2011 issue of the *Parlamentskaya Gazeta* presents this specificity as one of the key achievements of the Russian parliamentary system.

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