

From Apparatchik to President – From Businessman to Khan

**Regime Transition and Consolidation in
the Russian Republics of Buryatia and
Kalmykia**

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For my Russian-English translations I carry the full responsibility for any mistakes or misinterpretations. I have used the Library of Congress system of Russian transliteration, with the exception of some geographical names and names of well-known Russian politicians that appear in their commonly accepted English language spellings, e.g. Buryatia (republic), but *Buriatiia* (newspaper).

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1. Political change in Russia's republics

The Russian state developed a quite peculiar sort of federalism in the 1990s. The system evolved as relics from the Soviet territorial make-up changed their nature when the central state power was seriously weakened after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The result was a federal system moving ever closer to a confederation. Not only were federal laws contradictory and incomplete, the laws adopted by the federal subjects also frequently contradicted federal laws or filled in gaps where federal laws were still missing. The result was that the 89 federal subjects developed political regimes ranging from democratic systems to strongly authoritarian one-man rule.

Such a federal system calls for an investigation of the factors determining why some federal subjects turn democratic, while others develop a strongly authoritarian system. And, indeed, as the federal subjects gained increasing leverage on the political development in the Russian Federation, studies focusing on the internal developments in Russian federal subjects emerged as a popular field of study among scholars both in Russia and in the West.

While many of these studies have been descriptive and idiosyncratic,¹ a few scholars have tried to generalise and create typologies and new theories on the basis of Russian regional developments. Among these are attempts to adapt existing theories on regime transition and consolidation to the post-Soviet regional context (Stoner-Weiss 1997; Gel'man *et al.* 2000). So far these theories have been applied only to territorially defined federal subjects,² presumably under the assumption that when the population in a federal subject is multiethnic this complicates matters to such an extent that the theories need to be further adapted. This assumption is inherited from the early transitologists, who claimed that a democratic transition is unlikely to succeed in severely divided multiethnic societies (Rustow 1970).

In my thesis I will investigate whether it is reasonable to assume that traditional transition and consolidation theory is ill suited when applied to the ethnically defined Russian federal subjects. In order to explore this matter two cases will be scrutinised, the Republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia. After a discussion of my theoretical framework and methodology in Chapters 2 and 3, I will assess the extent to which transition and consolidation theory as it is applied to territorially defined regions also suits to describe the development in ethnically defined regions. The theories will be applied to the cases in four analytical chapters (Chapters 4–7): one chapter on regime transition and one on regime consolidation in both of the cases.

1 See, for instance, Mikhailovskaia 1995; Orttung 1995; McAuley 1997; McFaul and Petrov 1998; Melvin 1998.

2 In this thesis I will separate between ethnically defined and territorially defined federal subjects, where the former type of federal subjects is characterised by a non-Russian titular group, whereas the latter type has no such titular group.

My assumption is that traditional transition and consolidation theory provides a useful framework for explaining the political development in these republics, but that the ethnic factor makes the political processes in ethnically defined regions somewhat different from those in other federal subjects. This is because ethnicity potentially will strengthen the polarisation between groups in society. This becomes salient for the political development when political dividing lines follow ethnic lines. Thus, in Chapter 8 I will estimate to what extent intra- and inter-ethnic polarisation adds to the explanation of the regime development in Buryatia and Kalmykia.

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to a short description of the federal context before I turn to arguing for my choice of cases and independent variables.

1.1. The federal state in Russia

The Soviet federal structure could be likened with a *matrioshka* doll. Its administrative make-up was based on a territorial as well as an ethnic principle, and contained units with various levels of *de jure* autonomy. The ethnically defined union republics were endowed with most rights and the largest among these was the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the predecessor of the Russian Federation. This entity was again hierarchically divided according to the national principle into 16 autonomous republics (ASSRs), five autonomous *oblast*'s and ten national *okrugs*. Alongside with these were territorially defined units—49 *oblast*'s and six *krais*—with a number of rights that placed them between the autonomous republics and the autonomous *oblast*'s in the federal hierarchy (Stoner-Weiss 1997: 62). The titular nations of the ethnically defined subjects *de jure* possessed more rights than the other ethnic groups inhabiting the territory, but Russian culture and language were everywhere predominant and put the Russians in a privileged position. It can easily be claimed that the Soviet Union was a “federation in form, but a unitary state in content”³ because of the strongly centralised manner in which the Soviet state was organised. Still, the administrative units were, as pointed out by Rogers Brubaker (1996), “nation-states in embryo”, with experienced political administrations and national attributes such as languages with official status. This led to the fear that when the Soviet state broke up, not only would the union republics seize the opportunity to become independent, but “*matrioshka* nationalism” would lead to the break-up also of the successor states (Bremmer 1997: 11–12). This happened in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, and many politicians and scholars feared that some of the 89 units of the Russian Federation soon would follow suit.

Russian president Boris Yeltsin exploited the hopes many sub-units of RSFSR had of greater autonomy in the power struggle with Mikhail Gorbachev from 1990. The Russian declaration of sovereignty from the Soviet Union in June 1990 was followed by a speech in Kazan' in August where Yeltsin encouraged the regions to “take as much sovereignty as they could swallow”. These events are thought to have sparked the so-called

3 The Soviet nationalities policy was based on the slogan “national in form, socialist in content”.

“Parade of Sovereignties”, where 24 of the federal units declared their sovereignty (Khan 2001: 377). The Russian Federation preserved the Soviet period territorial make-up but the autonomous republics changed their status to republics. From 1991 a heated debate between the federal centre and the regions concerned whether the federal subjects all were to have an equal status or whether the asymmetric division between republics and territorially defined units was to be preserved. A new Federation Treaty was signed in March 1992, favouring decentralisation and an asymmetric federation.

The outcome of the centre–periphery battle was much shaped by the ensuing power battle between the executive and legislative powers in Moscow. Both actors in this struggle found it important to win the support of the federal subjects and gave them more and more wide-ranging concessions (Shlapentokh *et al.* 1997: 92–101). This soon came to an end after the shelling of the Russian parliament in October 1993. The republican and regional heads that had been supporting the parliament fell in disfavour with the Russian president; Supreme Soviets and local soviets were disbanded everywhere; and a more unitary line was pursued towards the federal units. When the Russian Constitution was adopted in December 1993 it demoted the Federation Treaty from a constitutional to a sub-constitutional document. Moreover, the constitution showed unitarian trends among other things by removing the rights the republics had to sovereignty and a separate citizenship. The republics did, however, keep their right to have a republican constitution, president, official language and flag (Sharlet 1994: 123).

Nevertheless, the development in the years after 1993 implied that the federal units evolved in diverging ways, and with divergent political systems. One reason for this was the fact that the Russian Constitution in itself was purposefully ambiguous on the issues of power sharing between the centre and the regions. The centre–periphery relations were further complicated by the signing of bilateral power-sharing treaties between the federal executive power and many regional executives, starting with the treaty with Tatarstan in February 1994. Finally, the federal centre did not try to prevent the regions from adopting a great number of constitutional clauses and laws that violated the federal legal framework (Khan 2001: 380).

A turning point in this development was the appointment of Vladimir Putin as new Russian president on 31 December 1999. Putin embarked upon a policy of strengthening the Russian central power and improving the federal legal framework (Nicholson 2001). One of his first steps was to start a “war” against the regional leaders, among others by attempting to weaken the Federation Council that had been the power base of the regional governors and presidents, and appointing seven presidential representatives to supervise the federal subjects within their districts. Furthermore, he started a campaign to bring regional laws and constitutions in line with federal laws (*Russian Federation Report*, 9 February; 17 and 24 May 2000). This policy has undoubtedly reduced the leverage the federal subjects have over politics at the federal centre and weakened their opportunity to act independently.

In the cases of Buryatia and Kalmykia, the demands from the federal centre to bring the republican constitution and laws in line with federal laws have also had a significant impact on political life here. Particularly in Kalmykia this has had the effect of deconsolidating the power of the presi-

dent to a certain degree. At the time of writing, the end result of Putin's reforms is still not evident. I have therefore chosen to limit my analysis to the Yeltsin period, i.e. until the end of 1999. The analysis will start with the power struggle ensuing at the regional level with the dissolution of the Communist Party after August 1991. When necessary in order to achieve an understanding of certain processes also earlier events will be included.

1.2. Justifying my choice of cases

Dependent variable: Regime type

The investigation of regime change calls for a definition of political regime. Safire's Political Dictionary (1978: 7) points out that regime can be defined either as "the power-span of an individual ('the Brezhnev regime') or a mode of government (*l'ancien régime*)". I will here restrict my use of the term "regime" to the latter meaning of the word, while to designate the former meaning of the word I will use the term "administration" or "government".

Since the aim of this thesis is to explain the development of different political regimes in Russian republics, I have selected two republics with fairly different political regimes. Along the lines of Dahl's definition of a polyarchy (1971: 1–9), I will define democracy as a regime with broad rights to political participation and with a high degree of contestation for political positions. At the other extreme are totalitarian regimes such as the Stalinist regime or Hitler Germany. In the contemporary Russian context, however, one can safely exclude the totalitarian alternative and rather speak of authoritarian regimes.

Ideally, my analysis would have been based on the study of political regimes that vary as much as possible on the dependent variable, for instance a clearly democratic regime and a highly authoritarian one. In Russian regions, however, most regimes are situated somewhere in the middle on the democratic–authoritarian scale, and purely democratic regimes are hard to come across. Alla Chirikova and Natalya Lapina (2001: 396) use the term "guided democracy" to describe the kind of democracy that is commonly found in Russian regions: one where alternative centres of power formally exist but have existed for such a brief time that they are yet too feeble to constitute a real counter power to the executive power. Among these guided democracies I have chosen *Buryatia*. Here political mobilisation started late and the first presidential election took place only in 1994. The winner was Leonid Potapov— an old *apparatchik* faithful to socialist principles. He was re-elected for a second term in 1998. *Buryatia* is among the more democratic Russian republics. For instance, in a survey called "Measuring Freedom of Speech", published in the autumn of 1999, it rated highest on the total index of freedom of mass media.⁴

The political regime in *Kalmykia*, on the other hand, has drawn much attention for its non-democratic character. The young businessman Kirsan Iliumzhinov was elected president in 1993. In March 1994 he renounced the republican sovereignty and replaced the constitution with a so-called Steppe

⁴ The survey results are published at www.freepress.ru/win/1.htm.

Code. This also had the consequence of strengthening the executive powers in the republic. Through extraordinary elections in 1995, Iliumzhinov was re-elected for a prolonged second term—without facing any opposing candidates. In 2000 Kalmykia together with Bashkortostan were ranked as the two federal subjects with the poorest human rights conditions in the Russian Federation (*Russian Federation Report*, 11 October 2000). In fact, the nature of Iliumzhinov's regime most of all resembles what Juan Linz (2000: 151–155) calls a sultanistic regime, which is somewhere between an authoritarian and a totalitarian regime. The sultanistic regime blurs the borders between private and public by allowing the rewards from power to benefit only the “sultan” and his collaborators, consisting of his family and friends. A mixture of fear and rewards keeps people loyal, but there is no attempt to legitimise this ideologically or to mobilise the masses the way totalitarian regimes do. The “sultan” is neither restricted by laws nor the conventions of traditional rule, and thus rules in a largely arbitrary fashion.

Control variables: Factors of similarity

My choice of case studies furthermore depended on whether the republics have many similar conditions that can be kept constant in the analysis. The design of the analysis is a most similar systems design, where the ideal is to use cases that are as similar as possible on the control variables but that vary on the operative variables. This variation can then explain the variation on the dependent variable. The control achieved from using this method is a partial compensation for the problem of lack of statistical or experimental control in the comparative method (Tranøy 1993: 24–25).

Judging by a map of the Russian Federation it is hard to believe that the two republics that are the subjects of my study have much in common. Buryatia is situated in Eastern Siberia, and borders Mongolia to the south. Kalmykia, on the other hand, is a steppe republic squeezed in between the Caspian Sea, Volga and the North Caucasian Republic of Dagestan. Despite the vast distance that separates them, however, their titular populations, the Kalmyks and Buryats, have an affinity by being the only Mongol peoples in the Russian Federation. Tribal wars forced the Kalmyks to abandon the territories they inhabited in Western Mongolia at the end of the 16th century and migrate westwards. From 1609 their new territory at the Caspian Sea gradually became incorporated in the Russian state, whereas the Buryat lands in Siberia were gradually conquered during the 17th century (Guchinova 1997: 57–63; Forsyth 1992: 87–100). The Kalmyks and the Buryats have preserved similar languages, cultures and the Buddhist religion.

One way in which such ethnic similarities could be assumed to affect political development is by their influence on political culture in the region. Along arguments made among others by Samuel Huntington (1991) about the linkage between religious tradition and democratic development, some would argue that the fact that Kalmykia and Buryatia are Buddhist republics has a bearing on their regime type, influencing the population to become more subservient toward authorities. This has been used by local Kalmyk scholars to explain the choice of Iliumzhinov as a leader (Guchinova and Tavanets 1994). If this is so, how then do we explain the fact that the repub-

lies, despite both being Buddhist, nevertheless have two different regime types? One could imagine that the Buryats and the Kalmyks, having lived separately for hundreds of years, have developed different political cultures despite their cultural affinities. Buryats, for instance, claim that the Kalmyks are more “Europeanised” than the Buryats but then go on to using this as an explanation of why the Kalmyks would elect Iliumzhinov as their president!⁵ On the whole, such cultural arguments are often regarded with suspicion by experts on the Russian Federation.⁶ Not only has most of the Russian territory been a part of Russia for several hundred years; the difference between authoritarian and non-authoritarian does also not seem to follow ethnic lines, since many territorially defined federal subjects, such as Primorskii *krai*, are as authoritarian as the most extreme ethnically defined cases. Preliminary results from a study by Neil Melvin actually show that statistically there are more authoritarian *krais* than republics (Melvin 2000). Furthermore, it is impossible for me to assess the nature of political culture in my two cases, as unbiased statistics on the attitude to government are lacking in Kalmykia.

Apart from ethnic affinity another similarity between Buryatia and Kalmykia is the fact that they both are among the less prosperous Russian federal subjects. When comparing the economic situation in the two republics, I find that Buryatia does better on most indicators than Kalmykia but nevertheless is far below the Russian average. For instance, Buryatia has a considerably higher GDP per capita than Kalmykia—477,500 roubles versus 280,000 roubles in Kalmykia in 1996—but the Russian average was 821,800 roubles. None of the republics have a strong industrial sector or rich natural resources, which characterises the so-called donor regions (the net contributors to the federal budget) in the Russian Federation. On the contrary, they are both heavily dependent on federal transfers. In Buryatia 35% of the republican budget in 1995 was made up by federal transfers, whereas in Kalmykia this share was as much as 2/3 of the republican budget (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 99, 146). This fact influences the relationship these regions have had with the federal centre in the 1990s. Several scholars (e.g. Treisman 1997) have argued that donor regions possess a stronger card in their relationship with the federal centre than do other regions, which provides them with more concessions. In the case of Buryatia and Kalmykia there is no reason to believe that the relationship these republics have with the federal centre is widely different. This is even more so as both presidents made themselves unpopular with Yeltsin during the executive–legislative conflict in Moscow in the autumn of 1993. Since then they have mainly kept a low and loyal profile towards the federal centre.

Independent variables: Factors of difference

One variable I believe does have an important impact on regime transitions and consolidations in Russian regions is *elite struggles*. I agree with Anton

5 Interview with Buryat political scientist Erdem Dagbaev, Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

6 Personal communication with among others Pål Kolstø, Richard Sakwa and Grigori Golosov.

Steen that elites can be defined as those who are “influential in setting the political agenda, in proposing solutions, and who influence policy decisions and their implementation” (Steen 1997: 15). I also agree that for practical reasons it is easier to assume that institutional position goes together with elite influence. Thus, the political elite is the members of the executive and legislative power and leading members of political parties. Enterprise directors, heads of the judicial power, leaders of organisations, interest groups, mass media and research institutions make up other elite groups.

When the regime transition was initiated from the Russian federal centre, various elite and counter-elite groups filled up the space of action in the regions. Furthermore, elite calculations and informal networks did not cease being important in the consolidation period but could on the contrary overshadow the processes that went through formal institutions. One of my variables in the analysis of the consolidation period will therefore be the role of *political processes*.

I do believe, however, that the actors did not act in a void: it was not so that in the transition period the existing *political-economic structures* suddenly became irrelevant. Therefore my analysis will also to some extent draw upon the functionalist branch of transition theory. I have already excluded the level of economic development as an explanatory factor, but will here focus on the fact that the two republics have different economic structures. I believe that this mainly had an indirect impact on what kind of regimes emerged, by influencing what actors could emerge in the elite struggle, what resources they could draw upon and whom they would eventually ally with. Furthermore, *formal political institutions* have an impact on the consolidation period: The institutions and legal framework both give opportunities to and put constraints on the actors in their dealings with other political actors.

Finally, as my task is to look at what is different in ethnic republics compared to Russian populated regions, I will include an ethnic factor in the analysis. Ethnicity in terms of political culture has been excluded from the analysis, but there is more to ethnicity than this in my regions. Both Buryats and Kalmyks have preserved elements of their traditional reliance on the family and the clan. This is, however, not only clan in the strict meaning of the word (*rod*), but also a mixture of direct kinship and relations with unrelated people from the same region, determined by territorial divisions. In Buryatia this latter type of identity is related to the *zemliachestva*—organisations protecting the interests of Buryats from the same region. In Kalmykia this phenomenon is called *ulusizm*, referring to the tsarist period administrative divisions in Kalmykia, the *uluses*. The sub-ethnic identity remains important, for instance when employers choose whom to employ, when asking relatives and clan members for help, and, in many cases, when deciding whom to vote for at elections (Humphrey 1998; Guchinova and Tavanets 1994). Its effect on regime development is different in the two republics, though, depending on inter-group relationships.

Furthermore, both the Kalmyks and the Buryats are minorities in their own republics, although the Kalmyks made up 45.4% of the population in Kalmykia in 1989 and thereby was the largest ethnic group (Guchinova 1997: 16). The Buryats are in clear minority in Buryatia with 24% of the

population versus 69.9% Russians (Abaeva and Tsyrenov 1999: 15). The republics therefore also have to deal with inter-ethnic cleavages in addition to the intra-ethnic ones, but the effect of the inter-ethnic issue is likely to be different due to the numerical difference.

To sum this up, the analyses of the regime transitions and consolidations will both contain one structural and one dynamic element. The structural element will be the existing economic structures in the transition part and the role of formal institutions in the consolidation part, whereas the dynamic element both places will focus on the interaction between elite and non-elite actors. Finally I will investigate how political actors use ethnic affiliations and the degree of *inter- and intra-ethnic polarisation* to obtain and consolidate their power and how this may in its turn increase the political polarisation in the republic. This will again have repercussions on how easy it is to consolidate the political regime.

2. Theories of regime change

2.1. Transition and consolidation theory

When analysing the emergence of political regimes it is necessary to speak about two distinct time periods, in which two different processes take place: getting to power and holding on to power. In other words, I will look at regime transition and regime consolidation.

To delineate when one period ends and the other begins, I will define regime transition as the period between when one regime is dissolved and a new one installed. This is a period when the political rules are in flux and contested (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 6). Transition to democracy is considered to be over when an agreement on democratic rules is reached, implying for instance that a new constitution is adopted and the first free elections held (Kopecký and Mudde 2000: 319). In my analysis—which is not about transition to democracy—I will consider the transition to be over once the new president has been elected. In Kalmykia the new constitution is adopted only after this and I consider this to be part of the regime consolidation—in many ways one can actually claim that this is what makes the regime consolidated.

Concerning regime consolidation, this is the period when rules and practices imposed in the transition period are transformed into more fixed patterns, creating routine and predictability (Kopecký and Mudde 2000: 320). Thus, in this second part I will look at how the presidents later used their position to strengthen their power in the republics, thereby creating the political regimes of today. For a definition of when I consider the regimes to be consolidated I will use a modified version of Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's definition of a consolidated democracy: A regime is consolidated when there are no significant national, social, economic, political or institutional actors interested in changing the regime or working to achieve this goal (Linz and Stepan 1996: 5–6).

2.2. Entering the transition

Transition theory as well as consolidation theory has sprung out of the theories of democratisation. Transition studies became particularly popular during the third wave of democratisation in Southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s, and when the turn came to Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s, scholars were eager to test their theories on a new part of the world. The studies are almost exclusively concerned with what factors facilitate a transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one, and they hold the underlying normative position of democratisation and modernisation theory that democracy is the most preferred regime type.

In the case of the former Soviet Union the democratisation success stories are few, and, as mentioned above, neither of the two republics I have chosen to look at fit the definition of democracy. I nevertheless find it useful to

employ transition theory in my analysis, since this can help me identifying what factors in the regime transition facilitated the emergence of non-democratic regimes.

It is common to distinguish between two separate branches of transition theory. The original variant of transition theory is the functionalist model, which emphasises the role of institutions and structures. Important contributors to the development of these theories have been Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Dahl, Barrington Moore and Larry Diamond. The other model arose as a criticism of the functionalist model in the 1970s, by suggesting a shift of attention from structures and institutions to actors. This position is among others held by scholars like Dankwart Rustow, Guillermo O'Donnell, Terry Lynn Karl, Phillippe Schmitter, Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan and Adam Przeworski. Here I will argue that both looking at structures without actors and actors without structures makes explanations incomplete, and show how transition theory can be adapted to fit better with the post-communist Russian development.

Functionalist theory: Focusing on the structures

“Democracy is related to the state of economic development. The more well to do a nation the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy”. This statement made by Seymour Martin Lipset in his classical study *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* from 1959, captures the essence of this branch of transition theory (Lipset [1959] 1981: 31). In his quantitative study of countries in Latin America, Europe and the English-speaking democracies, Lipset found a strong correlation between a group of indicators on socio-economic development, such as urbanisation, education, income, industrialisation and communications, as independent variables, and the level of democracy as the dependent variable (Lipset 1981: 31–41). Later his theory was corroborated and expanded by among others Robert Dahl (1971), Samuel Huntington (1991) and Larry Diamond (1992).

This link between socio-economic development and democracy has been explained in various ways. For instance, already Aristotle was concerned with the need for a society to have relatively few really poor people in order to make people engage in politics in a democratic manner (Lipset 1981: 28). In his historical studies Barrington Moore has followed up this point by proclaiming “no bourgeoisie, no democracy” (Moore 1967: 418). In modern times the middle class has become this bearer of values that facilitate political moderation and the development of democracy (Lipset 1981: 90–116). Among others, this is due to the fact that middle class people tend to be better educated—a factor that is supposed to make people more tolerant and broaden their outlook and ability to make rational choices (Lipset 1981: 39–40). Furthermore, middle class people are better represented in civil society movements. Civil society prevents a monopoly on political power and fosters co-operation and political participation—both elements of a democratic political culture. Civil society is also seen as a prerequisite for the emergence of political parties (Dahl 1971: 71; Lipset 1981: 50).

Functionalist theory: Criticism and modifications

From the 1970s functionalist theory has been subject to heavy criticism. Space limitations force me here to focus only on the criticism pertinent to the use of functionalist theory to explain post-Soviet transitions.

Already before the break-up of the Soviet Union it was pointed out that the Soviet Union and other Communist states in Eastern Europe fit poorly with Lipset's 1959 model, since they scored high on socio-economic indicators without being democratic (Diamond 1992: 103). And, in many ways the Soviet state was organised in such a radically different way that many scholars have questioned the utility of using the transition theories developed for the third wave of democratisation on the post-Soviet area. In many respects the transitions the post-Soviet societies had to go through were much more complex than they had been in Latin America and in Southern Europe (Bunce 1995). In the Soviet Union economic and political power was fused, making it necessary to transform both the political and the economic system once the system collapsed. Whereas in Latin America an independent capitalist class often served as an agent for political change, no such agent existed in the Soviet Union. Instead the concentration of political and economic power brought a heritage of nepotism and patron–client dependencies that made the fight for economic assets in the transition period even fiercer (Bova 1992: 129, 133–134).

If an independent capitalist class was absent in the early political transition in the Soviet Union, the privatisation process in Russia from 1992 enabled economic interests to gain a central place in the transition that later took place in the Russian regions. Kathryn Stoner-Weiss even argues that since civil society was weak the owners of large enterprises had a strong influence over the voters through their continued dependency on the enterprises for income and social services (1997: 37–44). However, whereas in other transitions the independent economic actors often have been viewed as agents for democratic change, in the Russian context such economic interests have often been agents for continued authoritarianism.

Some scholars consider that a factor determining whether the interplay between economic and political actors benefits a democratic development or not is the economic structure inherited from the Soviet period. Kathryn Stoner-Weiss argues that the crucial structural factor is to what degree the regional economy is concentrated within one sector and/or among a few large enterprises. Where they are concentrated in such a way the chances of effective governance are higher, because the economic and political actors enter a mutually beneficial partnership—the state providing them with material benefits, and the enterprises providing the state with a broad consensus on issues. One indication of this co-operation is for instance that the political actors often have a background from working at the largest industrial plants. In regions with a diverse economy, on the other hand, the political conflict potential is greater, because diverse interests produce greater competition among the economic actors for access to political power (Stoner-Weiss 1997).

Since Stoner-Weiss' focus is on governmental rather than on democratic performance, her argument does not give direct clues as to whether economic concentration promotes democracy or not. It is safe to assume that in

many cases the result of such a union between the major political and economic actors has been oligarchy rather than democracy.

A study that focuses directly on the prospects for democracy following from different economic structures in Russian regions is Vladimir Gel'man, Sergei Ryzhenkov and Michael Brie's study of six Russian regions. Their argument is that the decentralisation of parts of the Soviet economy after Stalin created two kinds of economic structures in the Russian regions. The way these structures interacted with political structures—by Brie called *political-economic structures of governance* (Gel'man *et al.* 2000: 63–65)—again influenced the political transitions in these regions after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The central difference is between regions where the economy was dominated by heavy industry versus regions dominated by agriculture and light industry. The political elite in the latter group of regions was controlling the homogeneous and hierarchically organised agricultural sector, and in the transition period it was easy to transfer this control to the new political leaders. On the other hand, where the region was dominated by large military or heavy industry enterprises these had been under the direct control of Soviet ministries in Moscow. The directors in this way achieved autonomy in their relationship both to other enterprises and to the regional political leadership. As a result of the privatisation these enterprises, as also shown by Stoner-Weiss, bolstered their position, and could either choose to co-operate with the political actors or to constitute an opposition. In the cases where they chose to co-operate this would most often imply political concessions to economic interests.

Brie concludes that in regions where agriculture and light industry dominated the regional economy, this facilitated the emergence of a monocentric, hierarchical regime, whereas if heavy industry was most important a polycentric and more democratic regime was more likely to emerge. A combination of the two structures in one region can lead to a bicentric political regime, whereas in regions where one economic sector is all dominant political and economic power tend to enter a symbiotic relationship (Gel'man *et al.* 2000: 93–95).

The functionalists emphasise the role of modernisation, and specialists on the post-Soviet development point out that modernisation in the Soviet Union after all meant something different than it did in other transitional societies. It must also be mentioned, though, that in many ways the modernised elements of the state from the Soviet period ceased to exist during the transition period and that this also influenced the outcome of the transitions. Diamond (1992) and Przeworski (1991) have argued that if modernisation is to be required for a democratic transition, it must not lead to too grave income inequalities. Furthermore, the material conditions of all groups must improve at least in absolute terms in order for the democratic development to be sustainable (Diamond 1992: 479; Przeworski 1991: 95).

The traumatic economic effects of the transition in Russia made many people turn away from the democratic alternative, being both disillusioned with the effects of economic liberalism and having a traditional faith in the need of a strong leader in times of crisis (Hughes 2000: 25). Under such conditions it becomes easier for a candidate who claims to stand above narrow

party interests to be elected, and also to concentrate the power with one leader who is believed to be able to solve the crisis more effectively (O'Donnell 1994: 65). I find this point an important one since at the regional level in Russia the political transition took place a couple of years after the economic transition at the central level had started. This implies that the effects of the economic transition affected which political leaders were elected. In other words, among the structural factors I believe were important for the transition in my republics were both effects of the Soviet modernisation and of the post-Soviet de-modernisation.

Genetic theory: Focusing on the actors

Stoner-Weiss and Gel'man use structural inheritances from the Soviet period to explain variations in post-Soviet transitions. This structural element, however, is just a background variable in their analyses, which otherwise are founded on the genetic perspective of transition theory. The starting-point of this perspective was Dankwart Rustow's *Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model* in 1970, which was a critique of the transition perspectives presented by authors like Lipset and Dahl. The genetic branch has among other things criticised the functionalists for being too deterministic in claiming that certain socio-economic figures or a political culture conducive to democracy are necessary for democracy to develop. Later, several other scholars have expanded Rustow's theory, drawing on experiences from the third wave of democratisation. Here I will look at some of the most acclaimed theories within the approach written by O'Donnell (1986), Przeworski (1991) and Karl and Schmitter (1991), before I argue for ways of modifying these theories to fit with the post-Soviet cases.

Where the functionalist approach emphasises more or less static socio-economic factors, the genetic model puts the spotlight on contingency and the dynamic aspects of the transition process: the actors, their goals, strategies and alliances (Karl and Schmitter 1991: 271). These scholars do not necessarily reject the validity of speaking about structural factors, but claim it is inevitable also to take the actors' actions into account.

Let us start with the keyword of the genetic approach: the actors. Who make the decision to start the transition process and what moves them to this? In his groundbreaking study Dankwart Rustow claimed the regime transition is initiated as a result of a prolonged political struggle between well-entrenched forces in society, which leads to polarisation. Weary of conflict, or realising that they will lose all power unless they make concessions, the political leaders make a deliberate decision to institutionalise elements of democracy. The result is a compromise that each of the participants only sees as a second-best alternative. The precondition for this outcome is that no single group is strong enough to dominate political decision-making (Rustow 1970: 352–357).

Like Rustow, O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), and later Przeworski (1991: 57), emphasise that the conscious decision by the political leaders to start democratisation is most likely to be made in periods of severe regime crisis. However, whereas Rustow's focus was on the elites, these scholars also include the grass root level. They claim that the intention behind the

liberalisation will be to broaden the social basis of the regime, in order to calm down social unrest. Rustow failed to identify what kinds of actors and alliances between actors are necessary for the transition to be democratic but this was attempted among others by O'Donnell and Schmitter in their study *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* in 1986.

O'Donnell and Schmitter, and also Przeworski, identify two groups of actors in the regime that participate in the transition struggle: *hardliners*, who are the regime members seeking a continuation of the authoritarian regime, and *softliners*, who gradually become supporters of electoral legitimation of the regime. These regime actors are facing the grass root regime opposition, which also is divided into moderates and radicals, depending on the nature of their goals and the instruments they are willing to use to achieve them.

It is, however, not the actors *per se* that count, but their actions. In the transition process they enter alliances and choose strategies according to what goals they want to achieve. Depending on the circumstances, either the ruling regime or the opposition gets to dominate the transition. Regimes normally initiate political transitions—so-called *self-induced transitions*—in order to bring a successful authoritarian regime more legitimacy through democratic elections. In the other case, when the transition is *opposition-induced*, socio-economic crisis and resulting regime crisis is normally the setting (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

Przeworski has elaborated on the alliances between actors in transitions by using game theory. He argues that self-induced transition (which he calls regime extrication) is dependent on a coalition between the regime reformers (softliners) and the moderates in the opposition. In order for this coalition to work, they must not only agree among themselves, but also be able to control the regime hardliners and the radicals in the opposition. Przeworski emphasises that ruling elites go for regime transition either in order to protect themselves from arbitrary rule or in order to improve their own material welfare, which has been important in the zero-sum game of the post-communist transitions. Therefore the reformers may agree to a coalition with the moderates, since this alternative gives them guarantees that they will keep some of their power after the transition. Extrication creates conditions that are hard to reverse later, by leaving power for forces connected to the *ancien régime* (Przeworski 1991: 31–32, 67–79).

Karl and Schmitter have made a more detailed distinction between types of transition by also adding a dimension of strategy, distinguishing between strategies of force and compromise. This gives four ideal types of regime transition: 1) Revolution, which starts from below with the use of force, 2) Reform, which is also mass-initiated, but where compromise is the strategy, 3) Imposition, which is elite-initiated, but by use of force, and finally 4) Pact, which is a compromise initiated by the elites (Karl and Schmitter 1991: 274–282).

Genetic theory: Criticism and modifications

O'Donnell, Karl and Schmitter developed their theories based on the impressions of the Latin American and South European experiences. When bring-

ing the theory down to the level of Russian regions, one obvious problem is the fact that the regions are not independent states, but simply sub-units within the Russian Federation. Transitions here took place as a result of the transition on the state level, and therefore it makes no much sense to speak of opposition-induced transitions—even more so as civil society was weak and played far from the role of the grass root level mobilisation in Latin American countries. Nevertheless, there are reasons to apply the existing genetic theories to the sub-state Russian level. As pointed out in the first chapter the Russian state has played a quite passive role towards the federal subjects throughout the 1990s, and Gel'man argues its role can almost be likened to the influence of the international community in state level transitions (Gel'man *et al.* 2000: 36–37).

Taking into account the differences between third wave transitions and transitions in the Russian regions, Gel'man, Ryzhenkov and Brie further develop the genetic theories to fit the Russian context. They draw upon Przeworski (1991: 10–11) when they argue that outcomes of the democratic process are determined by actors, the goals they have and the strategies to achieve them, their resources and the existing political institutions (including rules, norms, and decisions). Thus, the nature of the previous regime (conditioned by the political-economic structure of governance as shown in the previous section) and how the elites enter the transition process determine the outcome of the transition.

The actors in the transition process can either be dominant (implying the presence of one dominating actor—a monocentric regime) or non-dominant (polycentric regime). A monocentric regime is normally combined with a prevalence of informal “institutions”, whereas formal as well as informal institutions can dominate in the latter. The strategies of the actors in the transition process are determined by actor constellations and resources, and by the institutions. The strategies can be either force or compromise (Gel'man *et al.* 2000: 8–18). Gel'man and Brie draw particular attention to the role of resource bases in the elite struggle—a fact much overlooked by the other theories I have included. Due to the uncertainties of the transition period—when political rules and institutions are in flux—what resources the actors command become crucial in order to determine who wins the struggle for power (*ibid.*: 359–361).

By combining these factors Gel'man identifies five types of transitions—adding a fifth compared to Karl and Schmitter's typology: 1) *Forced transition* corresponds to Karl and Schmitter's imposition, and is a result of confrontations inside the elite or between the elite and a counter-elite—without the masses being mobilised, 2) *Revolution* is the forcible counter-elite turnover both in this and Karl and Schmitter's model, 3) *Reform from below* corresponds to Karl and Schmitter's reform, 2) *Pact* is in Gel'man's model a result of compromise between elites and counter-elites, and 5) *Conservative reform*, as a result of a compromising transition initiated within the ruling elite (*ibid.*: 22–25).

Table 2.1. Modes of transition

Strategies/Agents of change	Compromise	Force
Ruling elites	Conservative Reform	Forced transition
Ruling elites and counter-elites	Pact	
Counter-elites	Reform from below	Revolution

The major difference between the two models is that Gel'man replaces the mass level with counter-elites and further differentiates the model by adding the possibility of ruling elites and counter-elites being agents of change together. This gives an opportunity to differentiate between pact and conservative reform, which is not done by Karl and Schmitter. Gel'man leaves one cell in the matrix open, though, although it would be possible to imagine such a transition, which would probably lead to a struggle all against all. Gel'man justifies this by saying the model does not aim at being exhaustive, but that the options included were those that were relevant in the six regions studied.⁷

2.3. Entering the consolidation

Consolidation theory aims at answering the question: When the initial transition is over, how then to formulate stable rules and practices and establish institutions that ensure democracy to continue and to be strengthened? (Schedler 1998). Having identified different possible alliances of actors and how these affect the mode of transition, my first task here will be to determine the link between mode of transition and emerging regime type, before I look more concretely at how the regime is being consolidated in the post-transition period.

Exits from the transition

Among the different modes of transition, transition theory views the pact as being most conducive to a democratic development. Adam Przeworski emphasises that democracy is threatened if the opposition opposes the new regime both too little and too much. The pact reduces the level of conflict in the consolidation phase by dividing government offices among parties from a broad political spectrum. This solution has its undemocratic traits, however, by excluding outsiders and fixing the basic policy orientations (Przeworski 1991: 89–90). O'Donnell and Schmitter argue that in the long run such lack of political competition and public accountability produces corruption and complacency (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 41–42). Nevertheless, the advantages of a pacted solution are seen as more important than the drawbacks and Karl and Schmitter point out that regime-initiated transitions in general are more likely to result in democratic governance than other transition types (Karl and Schmitter 1991: 274–282).

⁷ Personal communication with Vladimir Gel'man in London, 9 November 2001.

Political institutions

The ruling elites and the ways in which they shape new political institutions provide the cement to the new political regime by establishing laws and rules that later can prove to be hard to change. Institution building links the mode of transition to the exit of transition, since many of the institutions will be established in the transition period—before the first presidential elections that according to my definition mark the end of the transition. In the consolidation period these institutions are polished and completed. Matthew Soberg Shugart (1997) has developed a theory that explores how political actors through lawmaking decide how much authority is delegated to the executive and the legislative powers, respectively.

Of particular interest to my analysis are Shugart's reflections around the presidential power. One can measure the difference in the strength of the presidential power by looking at whether the executive is given *reactive* powers (the power to block legislative proposals preferred by the majority), or also *proactive* powers (the power to introduce new laws that would not have been adopted by the legislative majority on its own). Proactive powers make the president stronger than the reactive ones. The choice, Shugart argues, depends on whether the lawmakers are more interested in preserving their patron-client linkages or in relying on political parties for their personal power. If parties are strong, they will give the president neither of these powers. At the other extreme the solution making for the strongest presidential powers—a combination of proactive and reactive powers—will only be adopted if the executive branch controls constitutional design (Shugart 1997).

Political processes

Consolidation theory focuses among other things on the implications of institutional design for the prospects of democratic consolidation. What is important here is not the institutions *per se* but the ways in which they function. Focusing solely on formal institutions, though, would give a misleading picture of the political reality in Russia's regions, where the gap between the formal and the informal often is wide. Thus, where the first part of my analysis of regime consolidation examines the institutional framework established in the two republics, the second part dwells on how the formal institutions work in practice and how practices that have not been formalised, such as clientelism and elite alliances, influence politics.

When moving into the more dynamic and actor dominated aspect of political consolidation I will start by borrowing some arguments from the debate that has been raging over the past years about what constitutional arrangement is most conducive to democratic consolidation: a presidential or a parliamentary system. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan are among the foremost critics of presidentialism. One of the arguments used against presidential systems is their potential for executive–legislative polarisation. Whereas a pure parliamentary system has a relationship of mutual dependency between the legislative and the executive power, pure presidential systems—as a result of direct elections of both legislative and executive powers—have a

relationship of mutual independence (Stepan and Skach 1993: 3–4). A consequence of the two branches' independence can be institutional deadlock.

Linz points out that another “peril of presidentialism” is the fact that these systems make it easier for the executive branch to overrule the legislative branch, at the same time as it is very difficult for the legislative branch to remove incompetent presidents beyond the elections (Linz 1996). These factors can facilitate authoritarian practices and a system resembling Guillermo O’Donnell’s *delegative democracy*.

With the term delegative democracy O’Donnell wants to draw attention to the fact that while formal rules and practices in a regime may be compatible with democratic standards, the informal rules and practices can work in the opposite direction. What he particularly has in mind is the case of so-called electoral democracies that have free and fair elections but where democracy in other respects is poorly institutionalised, or, rather, the institutionalisation is informal, relying on practices such as clientelism, nepotism and corruption. One typical result of this is a lack of horizontal accountability, because “Congress, the judiciary, and various state agencies of control are seen as hindrances placed in the way of the proper discharge of the tasks that the voters have delegated to the executive” (O’Donnell 1996: 44).

Criticism from horizontal government and non-government agencies does occur but this is generally ignored as the executive considers himself to stand above factional interests and to embody the nation (O’Donnell 1994; 1996).

Criticism and modifications

To some authors, the lack of a gradual and pacted transition in the Russian case has made this transition flawed (Bova 1991). Gel’man also considers the pact to be the mode of transition most conducive to democracy in Russian regions (Gel’man *et al.* 2000: 25–36). However, in the post-Soviet context there is reason to question the assumption that transitions from above necessarily are more conducive to democracy, even when one has in mind a pacted solution between ruling elites and counter-elites. The reproduction of communist era elites in politics, administration and the economy is acceptable only as long as these elites comply with the institutional rules of the game and in the long run promote democracy (Hughes 2000: 43). This becomes even more important in societies where civil society is weak. Evidence shows that Russian elites cling to communist era values such as patrimonialism, economic monopoly and restriction of organisational, judicial and press freedoms (Lane 1997).

Gel’man, Ryzhenkov and Brie’s study—unlike most studies within transition theory—not only creates a model for the modes of transition, but also a complete model of the regime types resulting from the transition. Four such exits are possible: 1) *War all against all*, where there is no dominant actor, but the actors nevertheless use strategies of force. The result can be an a centric regime, 2) *The winner takes all*, when there is a dominant actor using strategies of force, which turns the struggle into a zero-sum game, 3) *Elite association*, where there is a dominant actor using a strategy of compromise. When it comes to resource distribution, though, the dominant actor

sets the conditions, and the actors agree to preserve the status quo, and 4) *Struggle according to the rules*, which is the situation when there is no dominant actor and all the actors use a strategy of compromise. They agree on the institutions that are the least unacceptable to all the actors.

Table 2.2. Exits from transition

Strategies/Actors	Compromise	Force
Dominating actor	Elite association	The winner takes it all
No dominant actor	Struggle according to the rules	War all against all

The “missing link” in Gel’man, Ryzhenkov and Brie’s theory, however, is the connection between the modes of transition and the exits from transition. With five modes of transition and four exit types there is no one-to-one relationship. Also the categories are different: A dominant actor can originally be part of the ruling elite or the counter-elite. A pact results in struggle according to the rules and elite association will most likely be the result of conservative reform. The “winner-takes-all” exit, on the other hand, can both be the result of a forced transition and of a revolution, and the same is the case with the “war-all-against-all” exit. With reform from below the result is even less evident. One would believe that since the transition takes place from below and with adaptation as strategy the result would be that the ruling elites give up and agree to a “struggle-according-to-the-rules” solution—but one where the counter-elite is allowed to dominate. For instance, this is possible in regions where the economy is strongly concentrated around one industry. However, it is possible that the ruling elite will put up a partial resistance, in which case an “elite association” will be the outcome.

Concerning the study of the further consolidation of regimes, the use of consolidation theory to study the consolidation of non-democratic regimes can be questioned. For example, Kopecký and Mudde consider that consolidation theory should be strictly limited to the study of the consolidation of various types of democratic regimes (Kopecký and Mudde 2000: 321–323). In my cases it can even be questioned whether even the transitions could be labelled democratic. If they were, then we are speaking of *democratic erosion* into façade democracies, or *democratic breakdown* into openly authoritarian regimes. Regardless of this I do find some of the arguments and theories that have come up in the consolidation theory debate useful for analysing my cases. In both democracies and authoritarian regimes some of the same factors are important for regime consolidation, such as institution building.

The factors at play when institutions were created in Russian regions were somewhat different from those assumed by Shugart’s theory of why lawmakers make the president weak or strong. I agree with Shugart that whether the executive power took part in writing the constitution or not is an important factor in determining the formal strength of presidential power, and here it is important whether the constitution was written before or after the first presidential election. I still believe, though, that Shugart’s model of institution building creates an overly simplified image of reality. Shugart

looks only at how the choice of institutions influences the regime consolidation, but as I intend to show in my analysis, informal politics may in many cases be more important than laws and constitutions. The result can be a nearly almighty president even when the constitution does not provide him with both reactive and proactive powers.

This brings us to O'Donnell's discussion of the individualistic executive power in a system of delegative democracy. It has been contended that the concept of delegative democracy treats informal structures as an alternative to formal democratic institutions (Gunther *et al.* 1996: 158). My comment to this is that delegative democracies can be labelled as democracies insofar as they fulfil the minimalist definition of democracy: free and fair elections, and to a limited extent also possess other democratic qualities, but they cannot be termed *polyarchies*.

The same can be said about the political systems that have developed in the great majority of Russia's federal subjects. One factor that weakens the "polyarchic" nature of these regimes is the predominance of patrimonial political processes. Michael Brie emphasises how the executive power senses a need to connect privileged social groups to the regime. This is linked to the fact that a governor or president can only gain a monopoly on political power if he manages to centralise economic resources and co-opt all actors with autonomous resources into a "party of power" (Gel'man *et al.* 2000: 103–105). This patrimonial network may extend all the way down to the municipality level by exploiting the fact that the municipalities and *raions* most often depend on money transfers (Lankina 2001: 408–410). This kind of clientelist practices helps keeping the political processes within a circle of interested parties, preventing transparency in public life.

When informal politics are allowed to dominate it renders some of the assumptions of the theoretical debate around the choice of political institutions irrelevant. For instance, Shugart produces a dichotomy between lawmakers preferring to preserve their patron–client networks and lawmakers preferring to rely on the reputation their political party can bring them. In the Russian federal subjects, however, political parties were seldom strong, and the Soviet era heritage of patron–client relationships has been hard to overcome even in regions with a vibrant civil society in the early 1990s. The fact that clientelism extends even to the formally independent judicial power is a heritage from the Soviet system. Furthermore, the representatives elected to regional parliaments in Russia do in general not feel responsible to political parties or the people who elected them, but are mainly interested in promoting personal or sectoral interests. This makes the chances that the legislative power will be weak and fragmented and easy to co-opt for the executive power even greater (Mc Auley 1997: 258–260, 266–268).

The formally independent state structures do not necessarily enter an alliance with the executive power, though, and this is connected to the political-economic structures of governance, as explained above. For instance, the local self-government institutions may evolve into an alternative centre of political power, particularly around mayors when a large part of the resources are concentrated in the *oblast'* centre. The result is a bicentric political regime (Gel'man *et al.* 2000: 105–106)

The second potential buffer against strong executive powers in Russia's regions is non-governmental institutions such as civil society and mass media, but only as long as they are based on a real pressure from below or a divided resource base (Mc Auley 1997: 312). More often than not the presidents and governors have used their strong executive powers to control or silence these institutions. For instance, subsidies or accreditation are granted selectively, or the tax police and fire restrictions are used to close down media and organisational headquarters. The most extreme cases involve outright censorship, physical and psychological harassment, and even murder on journalists and civil society activists (Belin 2001: 340–341).

As potential alternative power centres I shall define the formally independent state structures of legislative power, judicial power, and local self-government institutions; and the non-governmental structures of civil society and independent mass media. How strong these power centres are influences the degree of transparency in the political processes in the republic. From the outset the executive power was in a favoured position in the Russian regions, and this analysis will therefore revolve around the executive, and view the other power centres only through their relationship to the executive power.

2.4. The “forgotten factor”: Multiethnicity

As already mentioned, transition theory has often assumed that a precondition for the emergence of democracy is that the states under consideration are not strongly ethnically divided. According to Dankwart Rustow (1970) “the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no strong reservations as to which political community they belong to” (Rustow 1970: 350). In a similar vein Robert Dahl argued that the historical record has shown that in highly polarised societies—where a large part of the population feels its way of life being threatened by another segment of the population—the competitive society is likely to dissolve into civil war or to be replaced by a hegemony. Compared to polarisation caused by class differences, the subdivisions created by language and religion are less changeable and more long-lasting, which makes them more dangerous, particularly when they are combined with territorial claims (Dahl 1971: 105–109).

This deterministic denial of the prospects for democracy in ethnically divided societies is one of the main criticisms of transition theory, and has been particularly criticised after the third wave of democratisation reached the multiethnic states of Eastern Europe (Bunce 1995: 92; Schmitter and Karl 1994: 178). Nevertheless, some scholars studying post-communist transitions, such as Vladimir Gel'man (2000) and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss (1997), have shied away from the “complicating factors” in the ethnically defined units of the Russian Federation and chosen to focus on territorially defined units with a predominantly Russian population. Gel'man's comment⁸ to this choice is that “in the republics other factors also come into play”. He avoids commenting on what other factors complicate the matters in the republics.

In my thesis I aim at overcoming the gap between studies rejecting the ethnic dimension and studies overestimating the role of ethnicity in Russian federal subjects. I will investigate whether adding the aspect of ethnicity in

8 Interview with Vladimir Gel'man, European University at St. Petersburg, 7 May 2001.

the analysis can enhance the understanding of regime developments in Russian republics. The most relevant ethnic dimension that influences political processes in non-Russian regions is intra- and inter-ethnic competition, and I find it useful to borrow some concepts from Donald Horowitz in order to grasp an understanding of these processes.

Horowitz' group entitlement theory was developed with the experiences of post-colonial societies in Asia and Africa in mind, but I believe it can also be applied to inter-ethnic relations in the post-Soviet context. His concept of group entitlement requires the existence of unranked ethnic groups; that is, two or more ethnic groups that are internally socially stratified and thus compete for positions in society—especially in the bureaucracy. Each group fears the dominance of the other group, suspecting that the share of power held by one group will be used exclusively to the benefit of this group's members. Competition becomes particularly fierce during periods of political transition, when the power balance between the groups is volatile.

To Horowitz, group entitlement is a combination of the struggle to increase the ethnic group's worth and the quest to exclude other ethnic groups. What kind of demands one ethnic group puts forward depends on whether it is *backward* or *advanced*⁹ compared to other groups—referring to dimensions like rate of education, representation in civil service, or degree of urbanisation. Most often the indigenous group is backward, creating a strong claim to priority in order to become advanced and avoid being “dispossessed” in their own country, especially if they feel they have been unjustly treated in the past (for instance when immigration was encouraged). The struggle to increase the group's prestige is reflected at the symbolic level, for instance the assignment of a special position to the group's language and the creation of state symbols connected to this group. However, some of these actions may also have repercussions on the practical level, by excluding non-speakers of the official language from public positions. Indeed, the aim is often to exclude other ethnic groups, and therefore discriminatory recruitment of people to civil service and to important political and economic positions is commonplace. In severely divided ethnic societies, the political party structure reflects the ethnic structure, and politics can be monopolised by one ethnic group. If the latter is a minority group, this has to happen at the expense of democratic practices.

Such a process of ethnic rebirth and claims for ethnic priority will most likely face opposition among those whose position is being degraded, and claims for parity, if not more. Their claims are justified by reference to the principle of equality or by their idea that they would deserve it because of their contributions to developing the economy of the country. However, the claims will be more muted if these excluded groups for some reason accept the priority of the other group, or if political disadvantages are outweighed by economic advantages (Horowitz 1985:185–228; Horowitz 1993).

9 The concepts are the ones actually used by Horowitz, with the justification that they are applied by the participants in the ethnic conflict.

Adapting to the context of Russia's republics

If theories of ethnic conflict assume that power struggles during political transition are more dangerous when ethnic groups are involved, and transition theory assumes that these transition struggles are likely to turn fiercer in post-communist societies because economic and political power is fused, this would mean that the combination of transition, communist society and ethnic divisions bodes for a particularly tough power battle. And indeed, over the past decade a number of studies have focused on inter-ethnic tensions and the ethnocratic tendencies of many republican governments in the Russian Federation,¹⁰ which shows that ethnic competition and the preference for ethnic exclusion are at play.

The numerical balance between different ethnic groups in a republic naturally influences what role ethnicity has been allowed to play, but it is not so that an ethnocratic regime must be based on a group that is in majority. However, in a study of four republics inhabited by Turkic peoples, Dmitry Gorenburg (1999) has pointed out that only in republics where the titular group has a dominant numerical position a political regime with ethnocratic tendencies can be combined with an open display of ethnic revival policies favouring the titular group. Where ethnocracy is based on a titular minority, ethnic revival programmes are adopted, but not advertised by the political leadership. Finally, in republics where non-titulars possess the most important political positions, the lack of ethnic policies is compensated for by a strong public rhetoric of ethnic revival. This can create the deceptive image that the latter republic is more ethnically polarised than the former.

The focus of most analyses of ethnic conflict has been on inter-ethnic conflict. In my cases, though, I will argue that intra-ethnic conflict between ethnic sub-groups of the titular nation has been of equal importance. A justification for applying the same theoretical framework to sub-ethnic as to ethnic groups is given by Horowitz. He argues that "there are no bright lines to be drawn between kinship and ethnicity, especially in societies where the range of recognised family relationships is wide and the importance of kinship ties is great". Typically, there is a tendency for political leaders to rely most of all on family members, secondly on members of their own clan and then on members of the ethnic group. Thus, the ethnic group is a natural extension of the kin-group (Horowitz 1985: 60–61), and the intra-ethnic divisions interact with inter-ethnic divisions in influencing regime transition and consolidation.

2.5. A new model of post-communist regime change

In this discussion I have argued for using a theoretical framework drawing upon traditional transition and consolidation theory, but adapted to the Russian context. While traditional functionalist and genetic approaches to transition theory in most cases have argued for the applicability of either purely

¹⁰ Worth noticing here is a series of case studies of Russian republics applying a so-called Model of Ethnological Monitoring to measure the level of inter-ethnic conflict in the regions. The studies were conducted by a UNESCO-funded network of researchers, led by Valerii Tishkov, and are published by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. See <http://mirror-us.unesco.org/most/monitor.htm>.

structural or purely dynamic variables to explain political transition, I agree more with analysts of post-Soviet regional developments in the Russian Federation who argue for the combination of structural and dynamic elements. Political actors and their goals and strategies are crucial factors in regime transitions, but these actors do not act in a *tabula rasa* context. Quite the contrary, their goals and strategies and the outcomes of these are influenced by the Soviet political and economic heritage—or what Brie calls the political-economic structures of governance. The way the economy was structured in Soviet times to some extent determines with what ease political actors manage to gain power in the political transition.

Moreover, also when it comes to political regime consolidation I intend to show that not only formal institutions count, but also how these institutions work in practice. One of the problems of democratic consolidation is to ensure that the institutions actually work: Constitutions and laws may be democratic, but when they are ignored by the political actors this does not matter much. Thus, both my analysis of the regime transition and of regime consolidation will include one structural and one actor-focused element.

Finally, I believe that some additional factors are at play in the regime transition and consolidation in the ethnically defined Russian republics that are not present in the territorially defined federal subjects. The keyword here is ethnic polarisation, which is related to the degree of competition between and within the ethnic groups inhabiting the region. A high level of polarisation will inhibit the kind of inter-ethnic co-operation deemed necessary to produce a democracy but at the same time it can promote alliances with third parties, or allow strong third parties to take advantage of the situation by using divide-and-rule tactics. Who emerges as the winner among the ethnic groups will also depend much on the numerical balance between the groups.

I will argue that strong ethnic polarisation will make the emergence of a narrowly based ethnocracy more likely. The fact that it is based on only some ethnic groups or sub-groups who are interested in excluding other groups from power strengthens the non-democratic character of the regime. At the same time, the fact that the regime is based on such a permanent dividing line like ethnicity strengthens the polarisation between those who benefit from power and those who do not. This increases the political instability and makes it necessary for the regime to use ever-harsher measures to remain in power.

3. Operationalisations and Methodology

3.1. Variables and hypotheses

To sum up briefly the conclusions of my theoretical discussion, the dependent variable of my analysis is regime type. In explaining regime type I rely on the following independent variables:

1. Political-economic structures of governance
2. Elite struggles in regime transition
3. Formal political institutions
4. Political processes in regime consolidation
5. Intra- and inter-ethnic polarisation

The two first variables are connected to the transition period and create the foundation for a regime that further needs to be consolidated. The third and fourth variables scrutinise this regime consolidation. Finally, by bringing the fifth variable into the analysis I will check whether the explanatory power of the model is enhanced when also checking for the variable of ethnic polarisation.

About these five variables I can make five hypotheses that will be the starting-point for my test of the theoretical framework against the empirical evidence:

- I) A diversified economy makes it more difficult to concentrate economic and political power in a region than where the economy is concentrated and in the case of a concentrated economy a strong presidential power is most likely to emerge in agricultural regions.
- II) Only an alliance between regime reformers and moderates in the opposition is likely to bring about the pacted transition that has the greatest chances of resulting in democracy. The mode of transition that is least likely to have a democratic outcome is the revolution.
- III) The way in which political institutions are designed influences the exit from the transition. In regions where the constitution is adopted after the first presidential election, this allows the executive power to get a more dominant formal position than in regions where the constitution is adopted before the election.
- IV) Formal powers combine with informal political practices to create an all-dominant presidential power in regions where non-governmental structures and formally independent state structures are too weak to ensure transparency in public life.
- V a) The numerical weight of different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups and degree of polarisation between them influence what alliances are concluded in the transition period and consequently the outcome of the transition.

- b) The ethnic balance in the transition outcome again influences the level of political polarisation in the consolidation period, which has an impact on what kind of regime is consolidated.

I do not believe that any of these assumptions alone can provide the full explanation as to why a regime emerges. Rather, the explanation is likely to be found in a combination of several of them.

3.2. Transforming theory into practice

The case study approach

I have chosen the comparative case study as my methodological tool for studying regime change in Buryatia and Kalmykia. Robert K. Yin defines the best context for the case study as being when you look at a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (1994: 23). Case studies are best suited for explanatory studies, but also exploratory and descriptive analyses are possible (Yin 1994: 13). Since my analysis is explanatory and focuses on contemporary events where it is impossible to divide phenomenon from context by creating laboratory conditions, the case study seems well suited for my purpose.

The most common complaint about the case study strategy is the problem addressed by Lijphart of “many variables and small N”, which provides a poor basis for generalisations. Yin counters this argument by pointing to the difference between statistical generalisations, where you generalise to whole populations or universes on the basis of randomly chosen units, and analytical generalisations, where theories are generalised by analysing units chosen because they possess particularly interesting characteristics. The former is difficult in case studies, whereas the latter can be achieved by replicating the case study under various conditions (Yin 1994: 21).

The complaint about generalisations even holds for comparative case studies. The low number of units also makes it difficult to exclude the possibility of spurious connections, and evaluating hypotheses is not as easy as when employing statistical or experimental control. One way of compensating for this problem is through the most similar and most different systems, as explained in the introductory chapter. Besides, the comparative method still provides stronger evidence than does the case study, since it gives the opportunity to compare cases systematically (Tranøy 1993: 19; Collier 1993: 106).

A way of reducing the many variables, small N problem, is by simply increasing the number of cases. When this is impossible or too costly, one solution can be to reduce the number of variables by combining them, or to choose a theoretical perspective that allows focusing on fewer variables (Collier 1993: 111). This latter option is what I have done in my analysis.

One can also defend small N studies by pointing to the difficulties in simplifying and looking for regularities in social processes the way quantitative studies with large Ns do. Instead the comparative studies take into consideration the complexity and historical context of each unit while looking for

limited regularity (Tranøy 1993: 22; Ragin 1994). Another problem about large N studies is that of conceptual stretching, when concepts that were meant to fit a smaller set of units, are stretched to analysing cases that may not fit that well. This has been one of the complaints about the use of transition study concepts in ever-new areas of the world (Bunce 1995). It is also pertinent to this analysis where the theoretical concepts are stretched not only to a new geographical area but even to the sub-state level.

Field studies

My analysis is done on the basis of materials collected mainly during two field trips to Russia: to Ulan-Ude in January 2001, and to St. Petersburg, Moscow and Elista in May 2001. Yin claims that one of the strengths of case studies is the ability to rely on multiple sources of evidence. If different data sources and different investigators point to the same conclusions, so-called triangulation, this increases the construct validity and reliability of the case study (1994: 90–92). This was therefore something I tried to achieve during my field studies. The materials collected were mainly written sources: secondary literature produced by scholars and politicians in the two republics, and primary literature that includes biographies and political programmes, laws, parliamentary debates, statistics and newspaper articles.

I further conducted qualitative interviews with politicians and scholars in the four cities. The interviews were of the unstructured kind, using open-ended questions. I nevertheless normally posed the same questions to all the respondents, with a certain adaptation to the subjects the respondent is a specialist on. The interviews were conducted partly in order to get a general analytical overview of the political processes in the republics. First and foremost, however, the aim was to gather more information on informal politics. This can not be found in official documents, or—as none of my republics can be said to be among the champions of press freedom—even in the republican mass media. With limited time for my field studies, interviews are also a more effective way of gaining information than reading newspapers.

Relying on interviews also had drawbacks that I will look at in my discussion of methodological problems. When choosing informants I tried to talk to people representing different political factions, and both opposition and regime. Since the ethnic aspect also is important I emphasised talking to people representing different ethnic groups and sub-groups, although achieving a balance here was difficult.

Analysing the transitions

In my theoretical discussion I identified the political-economic structures of governance as being the most relevant structural factor for analysing regime change in Russian regions. I will therefore start my analysis by giving a short description of the structure of governance in the two republics, defined as the main industries and the level of concentration of the republican economy. To describe this I will use statistical data and secondary sources on the economic structure of the two republics. Structures of governance seem to have mainly an indirect influence on regime change via elite resources

and alliances. Thus, I find it difficult to evaluate the role of the structures of governance and elites separately and will instead analyse the first and second assumption simultaneously.

Concerning the second assumption, the way I operationalise elite struggles is determined by the fact that I consider the transition to be over when the first presidential elections have taken place. Consequently, the analysis focuses at the factors leading up to this event. To structure my argument, I use the five factors Gel'man considers to be important to the nature of regime change. First I will present the main *actors* in the battles for presidency by examining their biographies. Secondly, I will estimate the role of formal *institutions*. Here I have in mind how the actors used existing institutions to position themselves and how new institutions, such as the constitution, were adopted and whom they favoured. Furthermore, since Gel'man speaks of formal and informal institutions I will in a separate subsection take a look at the role of informal networks like clientelism and informal political alliances. Thirdly, what *resources* the different candidates possessed will be evaluated, being they administrative, economic or informational resources. Fourthly, I will look at the *goals* of the candidates, and here I have chosen to consider their goals as they are presented in their election programmes and public interviews. Goals defined this way were important in order to determine why people voted for different candidates. The fifth factor is *strategy*, and this is operationalised as election campaign strategy, thus also influencing what candidate people voted for.

Analysing the consolidations

Above I have argued for operationalising the regime consolidation by looking at two factors: the role of political structures and processes. As mentioned in Chapter 2, some of the new formal institutions were adopted in the transition period leading up to the first election, while others were adopted later, and my third assumption suggests that this influenced how strong powers the executive power was awarded with. On this background I will start with a legal analysis of the role of the executive power in the constitutions and laws of Kalmykia and Buryatia.

Next, I will evaluate the role of political processes. O'Donnell has defined the lack of accountability and strong alternative power centres as important elements of delegative democracy, and this will structure my argument. I will thus start by assessing the evidence of a lack of transparency in public life in general, and then look at the role of alternative power centres. As alternative power centres I will define the formal and informal interaction between the executive power and the legislature, judicial system, mass media, local self-government institutions and civil society.

Analysing ethnicity

The ethnic factor may be seen as a part of informal political processes. I have nevertheless decided to analyse this factor separately, as my task is to investigate whether it enhances the explanatory force of my model in ethnically defined federal subjects. In order to measure the role of inter- and intra-

ethnic relations I will first measure the general level of ethnic polarisation in the ten-year period by looking at employment patterns and migration rates among various ethnic groups. Subsequently I will look more specifically at the role of ethnicity in politics: how ethnicity has been exploited by political actors in the regime transition and consolidation in order to gain power. This will be reflected in the rhetoric used by political actors, ethnic voting patterns, and what ethnic groups dominate political and administrative positions.

3.3. Methodological problems and weaknesses

In order to make a thorough analysis of such a complex question as why different regimes emerge it would be ideal to spend a considerable amount of time in the regions. This is particularly true when the problems are so sensitive as the role of ethnic and sub-ethnic divisions. I only had time to spend two months doing field studies in Russia, which for instance meant that I did not have time to go through more than one main newspaper from each region, and not for the whole time period. Such factors may reduce the validity of the results of my analysis. However, by collecting different types of sources, including a large number of interviews I hope to have reduced this problem.

Concerning my interviews I can see several potential weaknesses that it is important to be aware of when analysing the material. In both places the lack of openness and objectivity among the respondents is a problem and thus the reliability of the data is in jeopardy: The respondents always have certain personal interests to serve, either as regime opponents or regime supporters or hidden opponents. In Buryatia in particular, it was a problem that many of the respondents had not themselves directly been taking part in the political processes I was interviewing them about, as it was difficult to get to speak to politicians that had been active in politics longer than since the 1998 parliamentary elections. The information these respondents could provide was necessarily much based on second-hand rumours.

A further factor that can have provided me with skewed information in Buryatia was the fact that I found it very difficult to find respondents representing the executive power; most of the respondents represented the legislative power or political parties. It was also difficult to find ethnic Russian respondents, both among the politicians and the researchers, and this makes it harder to assess the role of inter-ethnic conflict. I tried to compensate for this during my second field trip in Moscow, where I spoke to two Russian, Moscow-based researchers with in-depth knowledge of the inter-ethnic processes in Buryatia.

Another problem concerning several of the interviews was short interview time, making it difficult to obtain in-depth information. Some of the respondents, though, granted me up to three hours of interview time. In order to obtain as sincere information as possible I did not use a tape recorder and gave the informants the opportunity to be anonymous. In Kalmykia many of the interviews took place at people's apartments, and this probably increased the reliability of the information.

The problem of subjective information also concerns the newspapers and secondary literature. In Kalmykia the mass media situation is strongly polarised between the regime and opposition newspapers. All official literature and political analyses also present skewed information, including statistical information. In Buryatia the situation with the mass media is also quite polarised, and here local, independent researchers focus to a little extent on political issues. Both in Kalmykia and in Buryatia the best political analyses I have come across are written by people who themselves are active members of one of the opposition parties. In such situations it becomes hard to judge what information is most reliable.

The validity and reliability problems of this analysis could only have been overcome through a long stay in the regions studied. Since this was no option I chose instead to rely on multiple sources from the regions and from Moscow and abroad—hoping that this would reduce the disadvantages to a minimum.

4. Transition in Buryatia: The communist and the pragmatist

4.1. Structures of governance

In my outline of theoretical approaches I argued for including as a structural element the so-called political-economic structures of governance. My assumption was that a diversified economy makes it more difficult to concentrate economic and political power in a region than where the economy is concentrated. I will now take a look at Buryatia and see whether the economic structure here corresponds with its “guided democracy”.

The economic base of Buryatia rests on a mixture of mineral resources, light industry and agriculture. Of the gross regional product in 1991 37% consisted of industrial production, 16.2% was agricultural production and 13.8% construction work (*Respublika Buriatiia* 1998: 173). When looking at the industrial production in 1990, light industry was the largest sector with 28.7%, followed by metalworking and mechanical engineering with 22.9% and wood industry with 13.2% (*ibid.*: 193). Considering that metalworking and machine industry made up only slightly more than 1/5 of the industrial production in Buryatia and the industrial production again made up 1/3 of the gross regional product, it cannot be said that heavy industry has a dominating role in Buryatia. Rather the economy is quite mixed between heavy and light industry and agriculture. Although diversified, within the industrial sector the economy seems fairly concentrated: 11% of the businesses have more than 500 employees, and they produce 74% of all the produce in the republic (*ibid.*: 194).

Consequently, the economic structure of Buryatia does not unequivocally signal a pattern of mutually beneficial co-operation between economic and political actors. Gel'man argues that a mixed, but weak economic structure leads to a weak regime structure where the contact between the political and the economical structure is not very strong (Gel'man *et al.* 2000: 98). Since the economy of Buryatia is weak and mixed the result should be something like a conflict-ridden and weak regime, where different economic sectors and interest groups struggle for a piece of the political cake. This does not square with Buryat realities, where the regime is quite firmly in the hands of the president.

4.2. Actors

When comparing the assumption above about regions with a dispersed economy with the transition theory typology of regime outcomes in Chapter 2 it seems to fit with the “war-all-against-all” alternative, where there is no dominant actor and the strategy is force. In Buryatia, though, the emerging regime has rather been somewhere between “elite association” and “the-winner-takes-it-all”, which supposes the existence of a dominant actor. Over

the next pages I will look at whether the elite struggle leading up to the presidential election in 1994 can shed more light on how a dominant actor has been allowed to emerge under such structural preconditions. My first task will be to identify the main political actors in this period.

The two main contenders for presidency in 1994 were two politicians that had been in the game for many years. In the power struggle within the republican Communist Party in the 1980s, its first secretary, Anatolii Beliakov, had been able to replace two of the most influential political leaders in Buryatia and ensure that they were sent off to positions in far-away places. The secretary of the *reskom*¹¹ in the period 1978–87, Leonid Potapov, was sent to Turkmenistan to help promoting national cadres, whereas the leader of the Council of Ministers in the period 1977–87, Vladimir Saganov, was given a position at the Soviet embassy in the People’s Republic of Korea. An opportunity to return from this “exile” arose only in 1990, when Beliakov was promoted to a position in Moscow. Saganov was then appointed as premier, whereas Potapov went back to the *reskom*, where he got the first secretary position (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 103). The “hardliners” in the regime had now been replaced by what can be called the “democrats” or regime softliners. These two politicians, Potapov and Saganov, were to become the main actors in the power struggle leading up to the presidential election in 1994, and themselves leaders of new factions of “hardliners” and “softliners”.¹²

A third contender for the political top position in Buryatia was Valerii Shapovalov, a 36 year-old former KGB officer who had turned to business from 1991. He had arrived in Buryatia from Rostov in Southwestern Russia in 1979, and was therefore the only one among the candidates who was not born in Buryatia (*Buriatiia*, 8 June 1994). The fourth and last contender was the Buryat Sergei Namsaraev, a university teacher who had been Minister of Education since 1989. He was encouraged to run for presidency to defend the rights of the academics. Namsaraev’s election programme thus focused mostly on issues concerning education and research and his election campaign was limited (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 68). The impact he had on the election was so insignificant that I have chosen to leave him out of my further analysis.

4.3. Formal institutions

Since the two main contenders for presidency in Buryatia in 1994 were the chairs of the legislative and executive bodies, the main political struggles took place within the formal institutions.

For Potapov and Saganov, who both fought to survive politically during the turbulent transition days, the 1990s started with uncertainty concerning their future. After the coup in Moscow in 1991 the Communist Party was dissolved and Potapov had to look for a new job. Saganov’s position, although he was now in practice the most influential person in the republic,

11 Abbreviation of *respublikanskii komitet* (republican committee), which was the highest republican body of the Communist Party. The *reskom* was chaired by the first secretary.

12 Interview with political scientist Boris Krianev, Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

was also insecure, since he had supported the August coup. Saganov got away with this, which shows his strong position in the republican elite, whereas the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Sergei Buldaev, was fired for his allegedly positive attitude to the coup. This gave Potapov a chance to re-emerge in the top elite when he took over Buldaev's position (*ibid.*: 47–48; *Buriatiia*, 11 January 1992).

The need these politicians had to further consolidate their power bases was reflected in the fierce power struggle that built up in the republic from the autumn of 1993 between the factions around Potapov and Saganov. The power struggle at the republican level reflected the executive–legislative power struggle in Moscow. During the conflict between the federal Supreme Soviet and President Yeltsin, the Buryat Supreme Soviet led by Potapov supported the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, whereas Saganov's Council of Ministers sided with the president. Potapov and three other members of the Supreme Soviet presidium had even participated at a Siberian Congress of Local Soviet Presidiums in Novosibirsk on 29 September that had threatened to establish a Siberian republic unless President Yeltsin followed the constitution. Later Potapov participated in the group of regional leaders, led by Kirsan Illiumzhinov, who tried to mediate in the conflict between the parliament and the president (Zverev 1998: 4). When the conflict in Moscow was over, this became an excuse for the Saganov faction, popularly called the “sovmin”¹³ faction, to purge the Potapov or “parliament” faction. They suggested that the Potapov-led Supreme Soviet Presidium would have to resign, and some also wanted the resignation of the whole Supreme Soviet. In the end, however, Potapov proved to be stronger: A compromise was reached, through which a temporary presidium was elected where both factions were represented (*Buriatiia*, 16, 19 and 20 October 1993).

This showed that a substantial faction of the Supreme Soviet supported Potapov, and in the period leading up to the presidential election in June 1994 Potapov proved *de facto* to possess the strongest administrative resources. I shall define administrative resources as advantages drawn from occupying an important administrative position—relating to control over the use of force (legal apparatus and police) and the power to make or influence political decisions. Evidence of Potapov's control over administrative resources was the election for the Federal Assembly in late 1993, when Potapov and his faction won all the three seats for Buryatia. This gave Potapov the potential advantage of being able to lobby for support at the federal level, but his ardent support for the rebellious Russian parliament in 1993 reduced his leverage here. Saganov, on the other hand, could boast of being supported by the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Sergei Shakrai, leader of the Party of Russian Unity and Concord (PRES) (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 52).

If Potapov was unpopular at the federal centre, his influence among the local elite became evident when it came to shaping new institutions that would replace the old system. The Potapov faction was victorious in some of the battles around the Republican Constitution, which was discussed by the

13 “Sovmin” is an abbreviation of Soviet Ministrov, i.e. the Council of Ministers.

Supreme Soviet in January–February 1994.¹⁴ For instance, the Saganov supporters were defeated in their attempt to bar Potapov from running for presidency by imposing an upper age limit of 55 years for the presidential candidates (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 57). As a result of these defeats and a general realisation of his own lack of popularity—evidenced in the defeat in the federal elections in 1993—Saganov made the tactical mistake to resign. Thus, the sovmin faction nominated the young deputy prime minister and leader of the republican committee for economy, Aleksander Ivanov, as their candidate for presidency. Compared to the two old nomenklatura personalities, Ivanov was relatively little known in the republic and in the regions in particular.¹⁵

The third presidential candidate, Shapovalov, was a total outsider to all these political processes. He was not himself participating in politics until he registered for the election, and consequently he lacked the opportunities the other candidates had to position themselves favourably in the power hierarchy and even to shape institutions to their own advantage. Further placing him at a disadvantage was the fact that he joined the presidential campaign much later than the other candidates because he was facing legal investigations for economic fraud (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 59).

4.4. Informal networks

The outsider status for Shapovalov meant that he also did not have the same chances as the other candidates for entering beneficial alliances with important interest groups and parties, although he did receive support from some enterprise directors.¹⁶ As shown by Stoner-Weiss (1997), such alliances with interest groups were among others important in this post-Soviet period because enterprise managers had a great influence over their employees by providing them with salaries and social services. As mentioned before, there were reasons to expect that the economic actors in Buryatia would have so diverse interests that they would start a fierce fight over the political *pirog*. On the contrary, though, Buryatia was one of the regions where a quite powerful and united economic organisation emerged, called the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. At their conference in October 1993 they proclaimed that they looked for a presidential candidate who “had a thorough knowledge of economic questions and not only the perspective of using the funds of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in a difficult and expensive election campaign” (*Buriatiia*, 3 November 1993). As I will show later, Ivanov was the candidate whose programme best served the emerging business interests. Thus, he was supported by some directors of new businesses, banks and investment funds. The Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, supported Potapov. One important reason for this was probably the fact that their *de facto* leader was Aleksandr

14 Interview with deputy speaker of the Narodnyi Khural, Viktor Izmailov, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

15 Interview with sociologist Galina Manzanova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, February 2001.

16 Personal communication with researcher Ludmila Itigilova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, April 2002.

Korenev, the director of the railway repair factory in Ulan-Ude where Potapov had been employed for some 20 years.

Moreover, many businesses in Buryatia feared that they would lose out in a competitive market economy.¹⁷ Some of the largest industrial companies in Buryatia, such as the airplane factory and the wolfram-molybdenum mines, have faced serious problems in the post-Soviet period. This made these businesses support Potapov who promised them more comfortable shock absorbers and it has also made many businesses very dependent on economic support from the republican authorities. A result of this is that the relationship between political and the main economic actors in Buryatia has been characterised more by co-operation than by conflict—but not an equal partnership as the one suggested by Stoner-Weiss. Rather it is fair to argue that the economic actors are more dependent on the political actors than the other way around.¹⁸ Such an unequal relationship facilitates the emergence of an “elite association” solution, where the dominant actor co-operates with other groups but always has the final word.

Finally, the fact that Potapov seemed like the candidate possessing the strongest elite support probably made it easier for interest groups to make up their mind about whom to support at the presidential election.¹⁹ In this way the possession of resources seemed to enable politicians to accumulate even more resources. I will now look more specifically at what resources the politicians possessed.

4.5. Resources

By making tactical moves to position themselves in both the republican and federal power hierarchy the candidates to various degrees achieved control over the most important resources by far if the aim is to win an election in Russia: the *administrative* resources. I have shown that Potapov on a number of occasions proved to possess a stronger influence over political decisions than Saganov.

Another important resource to possess in an election campaign is the *informational* resource: the control over mass media. This tends to derive from the administrative and political resources, since even in the case of non-governmental mass media the authorities can put pressure on them through the use of political powers and via the legal apparatus. This fact is illustrated by the largest scandal that took place right before the elections to the Federal Assembly in 1993. The newspaper *Buriatiia* was owned by the Council of Ministers and started a smear campaign against Potapov and his party “Social Justice”. In two articles it accused Potapov and the “Social Justice” candidate for the State Duma election, Lidiia Nimaeva, of having spent money that had been assigned by the federal Supreme Soviet for damages caused by flooding on their election campaigns. After the federal elections, some members of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet demanded a hearing

17 Interview with sociologist Galina Manzanova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, February 2001.

18 Interview with political scientist and former editor of the newspaper *Buriatiia* Erdem Dagbaev, Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

19 Interview with sociologist Galina Manzanova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, February 2001.

about these allegations. Here, Potapov was severely criticised and a special commission of deputies was appointed to investigate the accusations (*Buriatiia*, 17 December 1993). The investigators discovered that the money had been used as they should, and the newspaper *Buriatiia* was fined with 1.5 million roubles for the insult against Potapov. The Potapov faction further got their revenge when the procurator in Buryatia found that, although both Potapov and Saganov had received funds illegally for their election campaigns, Saganov had received a much larger sum illegally than Potapov (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 56–57). This case exemplifies the Potapov–Saganov struggle for control over the strongest administrative and informational resources. It showed that either Saganov had exploited his control over one major newspaper to fabricate lies about his political contender, or the investigations showed Potapov possessed the stronger administrative resources through his influence over the legal apparatus.

When it comes to what support the Saganov and Potapov factions received from mass media in the subsequent presidential campaign, the forces in 1994 were quite even.²⁰ The Saganov bloc had the support of official newspapers in the republic, i.e. *Buriatiia* and *Pravda Buriatii*, and also from the republican commercial TV channels Azia TV and Arig Us that were slandering the other presidential candidates. However, if this ever worked to strengthen the Saganov faction (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 60), it could do so mainly in the Ulan-Ude region, as in many other parts of the republic the reception of these TV channels is weak or non-existing (Budaeva *et al.* 1998: 175–176).

The *Buriatiia* articles had shown how high-ranking politicians could use their position to gather *economic* resources for their election campaigns. Rumours both about this and other election campaigns have suggested that federal transfers had been diverted into election campaigns. The non-transparent nature of politics in the region makes it difficult to verify these rumours. It is still possible, though, that the fact that Ivanov's patron, Saganov, was the head of the executive power and thereby controlled the money flows in the republic, provides an explanation why observers claim that he, and not Potapov, possessed the largest funding for the election campaign (Kislov 1998a: 2). No doubt the candidates also received funding from the businesses and companies that supported them. For Shapovalov this was even the primary way of financing his election campaign since he lacked nomenklatura support.

Thus, if Potapov seems to have possessed somewhat stronger administrative resources, and the division of informational resources between the two main candidates was quite even, Saganov/Ivanov won the battle for economic resources. All in all, the division of resources between Ivanov and Potapov seems to have been quite even.

4.6. Goals

I have shown that the support from important interest groups depended much upon the politicians' position in the political hierarchy or on personal friend-

20 Interview with political scientist Erdem Dagbaev, Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

ships, as with Potapov and the head of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. It would be wrong, however, to deny ideological motivation any role. To my mind, the genetic approach to transition studies over-focuses the role of the elites in determining the outcome of the transition. In the following analysis I will claim that the candidates' election programmes and campaigns condition the actual choices of the electorate— although these factors cannot be isolated from the candidates' backgrounds and resources. As in Buryatia the distribution of resources between the two main candidates was quite even, the importance of ideology on the election outcome becomes all the more evident. I will now present the election programmes of the three main candidates and discuss how they influenced what groups were supporting them.

The basic principles of Leonid Potapov's election programme had already been made public in connection with the election to the Federation Council in 1993. His policy was a mixture of socialist principles and a dose of market capitalism. Soviet history ought not to be thrown on the garbage dump, but be respected. Reforms should move gradually, with careful consideration for their social consequences. Moderation is a suitable word also for his programme on governmental reform and cultural revival. The former was stated in vague and general terms, suggesting that things were most likely to remain the same in the state apparatus. Likewise, in an ethnically mixed republic like Buryatia, it was important to step carefully in order not to alienate any groups. Therefore Potapov said he was aiming at the national revival of all the peoples living in Buryatia (*Buriatiia*, 3 December 1993 and 11 June 1994).

If Potapov seemed to promise no radical changes, Valerii Shapovalov's programme was the most populist of the three. His programme could be summed up in a headline in the newspaper *Buriatiia* (8 June 1994), presenting an interview with Shapovalov: "Before the decision is made I am a democrat, after the decision a dic-tator", which implied he was ready to act in a resolute and decisive manner. "The people needs a strong power", he said. This was to be achieved by firing half of the state employees and cutting the number of ministries to seven. Another aspect of the strong power was that the legal apparatus would be reformed and that ordinary citizens would obtain the right to own and carry weapons. Shapovalov's election programme was full of generous promises of tax cuts, freezing prices on energy and transport, and support to the poorest groups in society. At the same time the goal would be to reduce the dependency on the federal centre and to eliminate the budget deficit.

If Potapov went for stability and Shapovalov for radical change, Aleksandr Ivanov's programme aimed at the pragmatic middle road. In the election campaign he promised the voters that he "would not promise what he could not keep" and that "I am by principle against populism. I am tired of lying" (*Buriatiia*, 18 May and 16 June 1994). In his plans for state reform he emphasised the need for new and fresh forces, but at the same time alliances would be built with the old nomenklatura. Political power had to be strengthened from the bottom-up, starting with an active local self-government.

Above I have mentioned that both Potapov and Saganov were considered to be a part of the regime moderates when they arrived in the republic in 1990. Later Saganov came to be associated with a liberal political stance, whereas Potapov in comparison became the regime “hardliner”. This was also reflected in the political programmes presented by Potapov and Ivanov in 1994, where Ivanov was willing to go further in the direction of encouraging businesses through flexible tax, credit and investment policies and through a structural adaptation of enterprises to market economy. No mercy would be shown on businesses that ought to be declared bankrupt (*Buriatiia*, 28 May, 16 and 25 June 1994). Thus, the Ivanov fraction were the regime softliners in Buryatia.

When holding the election programmes up against each other there is no wonder that the moderate opposition, represented by the Communist Party, chose to support Potapov at the presidential election. The Communist Party and associated organisations, such as the trade unions, the Agricultural Union, the Women’s Union, the Council of Veterans and the Youth Union, became the dominant partners in Potapov’s election bloc “Social Justice” (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 51). The Communist Party was an important ally in Buryatia, where this was the only organised party that could boast of a strong membership and a party organisation in every district of the republic. In 1992 the Communist Party alone had more members than the other 15 political parties and movements taken together (*ibid.*: 48–49).

This could be juxtaposed with Ivanov’s situation. With his background as chair of the republican committee of economy and a quite liberal and progressive election programme he allied with parties of the liberal and democratic brand. These parties had all only recently been organised. At the federal elections in 1993 there had been a whole swath of different blocs with a more or less democratic agenda. For the presidential election 17 of these parties and organisations joined together in the bloc “For a Worthy Life”. PRES and “Unity and Progress” were the main building blocks here and “For a Worthy Life” became the election machine for Ivanov (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 106).

Among the candidates Shapovalov was the only one not connected to the ruling elite. The main organisations and political parties, as described above, sooner or later entered an alliance with the regime softliners or hardliners. Among these it is quite difficult to make a clear dichotomy between opposition moderates and radicals. On the one hand, Shapovalov supported drastic political reforms, but his economic programme could not be labelled radical. In the latter respect the liberal and democratic wing wanted more radical economic reforms but went for moderation in political reforms. Then, finally, the socialist wing supported neither political nor economic radicalism. This calls for a trichotomy in the case of Buryatia. It turned out, however, that Shapovalov supported Potapov in the second round of the presidential election. Therefore I have chosen to call Shapovalov and the socialists the moderate opposition and the liberals and democrats the radical opposition.

My assumption in Chapter 3 was that a coalition between regime moderates and moderates in the opposition is necessary in order to produce a successful democratic transition from above. As I have shown, the regime reformers, represented by Saganov and Ivanov, instead allied themselves

with the radicals in the opposition. These proved too weak against the coalition of regime hardliners, represented by Potapov's nomenklatura supporters, and many of the moderates in the opposition, who feared the market economy stance of the radical opposition.

4.7. Strategy

In order to win over the parts of the electorate that were not associated with any of the political parties, organisations or workers collectives supporting one of the candidates, the way the election programmes were conveyed was probably even more important than the content of the programmes. Modern election campaign technologies did not reach Buryatia in time for the 1994 election. No Moscow consultants were employed to shape the image of the candidates, and the sum of money spent by each of the candidates on the campaign was relatively modest. However, smear campaigns against political opponents were not unfamiliar to the contenders, as evidenced in the case with the newspaper *Buriatiia* in 1993. Smear campaigns were an important part of the election campaign of Ivanov in particular (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 108), but Potapov also used dirty tricks. Among others, some claim it was no coincidence that also another Ivanov registered as a candidate for the election: Vladimir Ivanov, who had been minister of foreign trade. This served to confuse the electorate about who was who of the candidates, and perhaps made many people associate the scandals connected with V. Ivanov with A. Ivanov.²¹

Potapov to a greater extent than the other candidates relied on the more traditional way of running the election campaign by travelling to the regional centres and villages to meet with the electorate (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 108). Ivanov also sensed an acute need to travel in the regions, however, since he was well aware that people in the countryside did not know him well and that Potapov had a long lead on him there. At an equal disadvantage in this respect was Shapovalov, who in addition to this entered the election campaign much later than the other candidates. With limited time and resources, he chose to focus his efforts on the voters in Ulan-Ude and the central region (*Buriatiia*, 25 June 1994).

The timing of the election campaign was also important in explaining why Ivanov lost. In Buryatia people had already gone through the first round of republican level privatisation and rapid market reforms at the time of the presidential election. The privatisation and reforms had been implemented by the Saganov government, and Ivanov got his part in the accusations for the failures of these reforms. In this respect Potapov had been luckier when ending up as leader of the parliament from 1991. Here he was more protected against public criticism and could take advantage of the public distrust against the government in his presidential campaign.²² In their dis-

21 V. Ivanov had been forced to resign from his minister position for his support to the Russian Supreme Soviet during the 1993 conflict. He withdrew from the presidential election relatively early. Interview with sociologist Galina Manzanova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, February 2001.

22 Interview with sociologist Seseg Budaeva, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

illusionment with market liberalism people went back to the safe and well known: the socialist ideas of the party *apparatchik* Potapov.

4.8. The election outcome

At the presidential election in Buryatia on 16 June 1994 54.1% of the electors participated, of which 46.2% voted for Potapov, 25.7% for Ivanov, 15.7% for Shapovalov and 7.9% for Namsaraev (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 108). In the second ballot on 30 June Potapov won a landslide victory: He received 71.71% of the votes, compared to 24.90% for Ivanov. When Potapov received support also from Shapovalov's voters he won all three districts in Ulan-Ude clearly, although this was where Ivanov had expected to gain most of his support (*Buriatia*, 5 July 1994).

When push came to shove, Potapov's election programme and strategy coupled with his long political experience and strong administrative position was what won him the presidency. Potapov and Saganov were no doubt the two most famous politicians in Buryatia, and were unrivalled in the competition for presidency in Buryatia through the access they had both to economic, political, administrative and informational resources. When Saganov decided not to run for election, his replacement, Ivanov, was facing the difficult task of getting people in the most far-flung corners of Buryatia to know who he was. The same was the case for Shapovalov, but when the former tried to win votes in the districts through extensive travelling, this may have caused him to lose in Ulan-Ude, where Shapovalov won in two of three districts.

According to Gel'man's typology of regime change, the transition in Buryatia corresponded to conservative reform, where the ruling elite dominates the transition but by using a strategy of adaptation to other elite groups. Since in Buryatia the regime reformers allied themselves with the opposition radicals while the regime hardliners entered a coalition with the opposition moderates, transition theory does not leave the republic with much chances of a regime transition ending in a democratic regime. The hardliners will not be ideologically enticed to support considerable regime reforms, and therefore much will remain the same in the political rule of the republic. In Buryatia the share of the electorate belonging to the opposition moderates was far larger than the share supporting opposition radicals. This partly had to do with the timing of the election in Buryatia: People were not impressed with what "liberal" politicians and market economy had been able to achieve neither at the federal level nor in the republic, and preferred a return to what they were used to.

Important in ensuring the victory of the hardliners was also their support among the most powerful and united economic interests in Buryatia. Despite the relatively dispersed economic structure of the republic, many of the main industries co-operated in the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and this organisation entered an alliance with Potapov. The political and economic actors were, however, not equal partners in this alliance, which also helps explaining why the outcome of the transition was a regime close to "elite association".

5. Transition in Kalmykia: The businessman and the general

5.1. Structures of governance

In the case of Buryatia I found that the political-economic structure of governance there did not quite fit with the theoretical expectations, since Buryatia has a mixed but weak economy but nevertheless a quite strong political regime. The regime has allied itself with parts of the economic elite, although neither Stoner-Weiss nor Gel'man predicts such an alliance under these circumstances.

Kalmykia is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped regions in the Russian Federation. Agriculture traditionally has a dominant position, with an emphasis on sheep and cattle farming. Whereas in 1995 33.9% of the population of Kalmykia were employed in the agricultural sector, only 9.5% worked in industry. The industrial base of Kalmykia is weak (*The Territories* 1999: 68), consisting mainly of food industry, supplemented with some mechanical engineering, metal processing industry and manufacture of building materials. As a matter of fact, compared to the industrial heavy-weights of the Volga region Kalmykia produces only 0.5% of this region's industrial output, and on a national basis only 0.1%. Until the 1990s the region did not even have processing industry for two of its main products: wool and hide. Kalmykia has a share in the oil and gas riches of the Caspian Sea, but that remains largely untapped. Until 1994 the Kalmyks did not even themselves exploit their oil and gas resources, but left this to the neighbouring Astrakhan *oblast'* (Kolosov and Streletskii 1996: 27–28).

Consequently, it seems that Kalmykia possesses an economic structure of the kind Gel'man argues facilitates an authoritarian “winner-takes-all” rule. The lack of large and powerful industrial enterprises in Kalmykia meant that it was not very likely that the leaders of these enterprises would constitute an alternative power centre to the political leadership. Instead it was likely that these companies would be eager to receive political support in order to survive in the market economy. Neither would the agrarian sector be able to represent a strong and independent economic counterweight to the political power: It remained unified under republican control—and in a dire state after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

My theory supposes, however, that other factors also may be at play in determining the outcome of a regime transition. I will assume that, like in the case of Buryatia, the connection between structural conditions and elite strategies is not completely deterministic, but that there are elements in the latter that can make the regime transition change in a different direction than supposed by the structural preconditions. When now delving into these elite struggles, it seems reasonable to start out by identifying the main actors in the battle for presidency in 1993.

5.2. Actors

There were three candidates participating in the 1993 presidential campaign in Kalmykia: one Party employee, one businessman and one general. The only member of the local nomenklatura participating was Vladimir Bambaev. He was a worker who gradually had risen in the Party hierarchy from being a Komsomol and trade union employee to *reskom* secretary for agriculture and, from 1990, president of the Farmers' Association in Kalmykia (Kasimov 1993: 7).

A very strong counter-candidate proclaimed his ambitions for presidency in August 1992 (Tolz 1993: 41). This was Kirsan Iliumzhinov, a 30-year old Kalmyk from Elista. He had done a Komsomol career in Elista, but then went off to Moscow to study international economy at the elite college MGIMO. Upon graduation he embarked on a business career and soon became the owner of his own sprawling Moscow-based international corporation, San. Upon his own words he owned 50 enterprises engaged in everything from computer installation to textile and brick production. In 1993 these businesses turned over 500 million US dollars (Mark 1998: 14, *Izvestiia Kalmykii*, 16 February 1996). His influence was enhanced when he became president of the Russian Chamber of Entrepreneurs, and already in 1990 he was included in the political elite when he was elected people's deputy from Kalmykia for the Congress of People's Deputies in RSFSR.

But Iliumzhinov had to face competition from another proud son of the republic in the 1993 election. Valerii Ochirov was a general of the Soviet air force with a long and esteemed career: He had served in GDR, fought in Afghanistan and was subsequently awarded with the title Hero of the Soviet Union. In 1993 he was the First Deputy Commander of the air force of the land troops in Russia. His political career started in 1989 when he was elected to represent Kalmykia at the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR. In Moscow he became deputy chairman of the Committee of Defence and National Security in the Supreme Soviet (*Izvestiia Kalmykii*, 19 February 1993). Among his friends he counted the two generals in charge of the neighbouring republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia, Dzhokhar Dudaev and Ruslan Aushev, as well as patriotically oriented politicians in Moscow, such as the former general Aleksandr Rutskoi.

Consequently, the three candidates for the 1993 presidential election were all already involved in politics: one at the republican level and two at the national level. Ochirov and Iliumzhinov would thus seem to be the counter-elite candidates in this election, whereas Bambaev is the regime candidate. This would be the opposite situation of the one in Buryatia, where candidates from the ruling elite dominated 2:1.

5.3. Informal networks

Stoner-Weiss argues that in regions where the economy is concentrated like it is in Kalmykia, the political and economic power will co-operate and produce high governance efficiency. In the transition period in Kalmykia the political power and the largest interest group, the agrarian sector, led by Bambaev, were still fused. However, in addition to this, the two above-mentioned contenders to this alliance emerged. On the surface they seemed to be

counter-elite candidates, but below I will argue for reasons to doubt this assumption.

In the period 1989–90 candidates for political positions in Kalmykia were still nominated by the Communist Party (Kolosov and Streletskii 1996: 28), so in order to be elected to these positions one needed to have a substantial support in the local nomenklatura. This was also true for the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 and 1990, when Iliumzhinov and Ochirov had entered politics. The explanation for the support to these candidates is to be found in the events leading up to the 1993 election.

A presidential election was announced in Kalmykia already in 1991—the second in the Russian Federation after Tatarstan. After the 1990 election to the Supreme Soviet in Kalmykia, the first signs of an inter-elite division had emerged that paralleled the development in Buryatia. The division was between the Supreme Soviet led by Vladimir Basanov, who was also former *reskom* secretary, and the Council of Ministers, chaired by Batyr Mikhailov. This executive–legislative conflict played on an ideological confrontation between the more pro-reform Mikhailov and the pro-sovereignty Basanov, and their respective groups of supporters in the Council of Ministers and Supreme Soviet (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 153). The presidential election was initiated in order to put an end to this executive–legislative conflict, but most of all it can be explained by a strong urge for sovereignty in the republican political elite.²³

The candidates in the presidential election in October 1991 were Basanov, Mikhailov and a young *raion*²⁴ leader, Chumudov. The election ended in a deadlock: None of the candidates achieved the number of votes necessary in order to win even in the second ballot, as more than 50% of the voters either stayed home or voted against all the candidates in both rounds. According to the law a new election now had to be held, where the candidates from the first election were not allowed to participate (Guchinova and Tavanets 1995: 26).

This paved the way for a different development in Kalmykia than in Buryatia. In the period between the first and the second election the executive–legislative conflict reached such levels that both Basanov and Mikhailov were forced to step down due to allegations of illegal commercial activities. In late 1992 they were replaced by Ilia Bugdaev and Maksim Mukubenov (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 153). Only a couple of months later a new election campaign was under way. Two parties (the Communist Party and the Slavs of Kalmykia) and several actors did not participate, refusing to accept the new presidential election. The latter included Bugdaev and Mukubenov, who had not managed to establish their authority in the republic since they were appointed and thus feared to lose an election.²⁵ Consequently, the two persons that in theory would be most able to draw upon administrative resources were out of the game. The only nomenklatura member who was nominated was the head of the agricultural sector, Bambaev. But, the strong executive–legislative fight for power in the three preceding years had to such an extent discredited the Party elite that it would not take

23 Personal communication with Ivan Ryzhkov, leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia, April 2002.

24 One type of municipalities in the Russian Federation.

25 Personal communication with Ivan Ryzhkov, leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia, April 2002.

much competition from outside the elite before they would lose power (Mark 1998: 14).

Probably this was a fact realised also by several nomenklatura members, and they started looking around for suitable outsider candidates for the presidency. One faction chose Iliumzhinov, another Ochirov. Rather than speaking of factions it may be more correct to speak of the support from influential individuals,²⁶ and the support from such individuals both in the republic and at the federal centre turned out far more important than the support from a weak civil society in the election in Kalmykia. Influential people in the local nomenklatura, most notably the poet and Politburo candidate member David Kugul'tinov, had provided Iliumzhinov with financial help already in the 1990 election campaign.²⁷ Such support makes it questionable whether Iliumzhinov and Ochirov really can be labelled opposition candidates.

5.4. Formal institutions

The elite alliances were not only reflected through informal and covert agreements, but also in the way formal institutions were shaped in the period leading up to the presidential election in 1993. Compared to Buryatia, where the formal institutions were the main battleground for the elite struggle, the informal networks were at the centre of events. The communist era formal institutions and constitution remained more or less intact. Moreover, Iliumzhinov and Ochirov—as they were not participating in politics locally—did not have the opportunity directly to use and shape institutions to their own advantage. Still, the fact that they relied on powerful supporters in the political elite became obvious when the law on the presidency was amended ahead of the 1993 election.

According to the 1991 law on the republican presidency neither Iliumzhinov nor Ochirov were entitled to stand for election. Firstly, the law demanded that the candidates had to live permanently in the republic, which neither of them did, secondly that the candidates should be 35 years old or older, which Iliumzhinov was not. However, during the months leading up to the election their supporters managed to convince the Supreme Soviet into changing the law so that they would be able to participate. In the case of the first requirement an exemption was made for people's deputies of the Russian Federation and people working in the federal Supreme Soviet and in the latter case the age limit was lowered to 30 years (Andzhaev 2001). This indicates that the support for Iliumzhinov in the Supreme Soviet must have been larger than for Ochirov, since the Ochirov supporters must have been eager to prevent the age limit from being lowered. Moreover, the support for these two candidates must already at that point have been larger than the support of the nomenklatura candidate, Bambaev, since his supporters clearly must have been interested in preventing the law from being amended.

²⁶ Interview with former procurator in Kalmykia, Vladimir Shipeev, Moscow, June 2001.

²⁷ Interview with former deputy in the State Duma, Bembia Khulkhachiev, Moscow, June 2001.

5.5. Resources

What background the candidates had and who supported them determined what resources they possessed in the election campaign—a factor shown by Gel'man to be of great importance in determining the result of uncertain transitions. In the case of Buryatia I showed that the fact that the two main candidates were nomenklatura candidates with the most direct access to administrative resources in the republic seriously weakened the chances any of the other candidates had to become elected.

In Kalmykia none of the candidates directly possessed administrative resources in terms of the right to make political decisions in the republic or to control the police and judicial power. Bambaev, though, was head of the strongest interest group in Kalmykia, the Farmers' Association. Stoner-Weiss does not in her analysis directly mention regions that are so dominated by the agricultural sector as Kalmykia. If assuming, however, that the same goes for such regions as for other regions with a strongly concentrated economy, then the economic structure in Kalmykia will encourage co-operation between these agrarian interests and the regime. Such a co-operation goes without saying in the 1991–93 political situation in Kalmykia, when agriculture was firmly in the hands of the Party elite. The curious fact here, however, was that this co-operation did not produce a winning coalition. On the contrary, Bambaev was a politician known for already having lost several elections, and this was probably an important reason why he failed to muster the support of the large part of the nomenklatura (Kasimov 1993: 7). In the mass media his campaign received poor coverage in all but one newspaper (*Sovetskaia Kalmykiia*), and Bambaev himself complained that the mass media boycotted him (*Izvestiia Kalmykiia*, 19 February 1993). This is a proof to the fact that the role of structures should not be over-emphasised: A structural explanation would have predicted a stable and winning agrarian-regime coalition, whereas in order to explain Bambaev's failure pure elite calculations must be considered. Considering the marginal impact Bambaev had on the election campaign, I will from now on focus mainly on Iliumzhinov and Ochirov.

Iliumzhinov was already a familiar face to people in Kalmykia when the election campaign started in 1993. Ever since he was elected a people's deputy in 1990 local mass media had provided broad reports whenever he visited Kalmykia.²⁸ In these reports Iliumzhinov did not show particular modesty neither when describing his own wealth, nor his network of important contacts in Moscow and abroad. Iliumzhinov has frequently been accused of exploiting federal transfers to Kalmykia from the moment he was elected a deputy in 1990. Evidence shows that Iliumzhinov's bank, Step', received a 14 billion roubles credit from the federal authorities that should have been—but was not—used for the purchase of wool in the republic. Furthermore, Iliumzhinov's company San had, thanks to the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, Nikolai Ryzhkov, received a licence in 1990 on the export of 40,000 tons of surplus crude oil for Kalmykia. The traces of both the oil and the money earned on the sale of it—allegedly some 3.8 million dollars—disappeared (*Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 24 April 1993; *Novaia*

28 Interview with Valerii Badmaev, deputy chairman of Yabloko in Kalmykia, Elista, May 2001.

Ezhednevnaia Gazeta, 7 May 1993). His opponents during the election campaign claimed that parts of both the wool credit and this oil money went into financing Iliumzhinov's election campaign.

Ochirov did not speak openly of his own financial situation in the election campaign, but some sources suggest that his economic activities were also highly dubious. He was a member of the so-called International Russian Club, among others with Aleksandr Rutskoi. The chairman of the club, Mikhail Bocharov, was allegedly active in weapon purchases from Kaliningrad, and Ochirov himself had for a while been engaged in white-washing of Communist Party money. Most likely these sources provided him with funding for his election campaign (Kasimov 1993: 9).

Both Iliumzhinov and Ochirov thus had—mainly thanks to their useful contacts at the federal level—access to considerable financial resources, which was crucial in order to finance their election campaign, and in the case of Iliumzhinov for his whole image. Consequently, these two “outsider” candidates were in a quite different situation from the outsider candidate in Buryatia, who economically was dwarfed by the two nomenklatura candidates. In Kalmykia it was the “outsiders” who dwarfed the insider. These large sources of external funding further undermine explanations emphasising the role of the economic structure for the regime outcome.

Another resource that needs to be considered is the informational resource. Mass media is weakly developed in Kalmykia, with only one radio channel, two TV channels (one of which broadcasts only in the republican capital of Elista and the surrounding areas), and five republic-level newspapers. The main official newspaper *Izvestiia Kalmykii* presented information about all three candidates, but significantly more materials and in a more enthusiastic vein about Iliumzhinov, and far less about Bambaev than about Ochirov. It was said that Iliumzhinov had actively been supporting the editor at the last election for the Supreme Soviet, and that this explained why the newspaper favoured Iliumzhinov. The only mass medium clearly opposing Iliumzhinov was the newspaper *Sovetskaia Kalmykii*, which was owned by the Farmers' Association and the Federation of Trade Unions in Kalmykia. This newspaper gave its preferences to Bambaev but also allowed space for Ochirov (Kasimov 1993: 4–5), who apart from this received coverage in Moscow newspapers. In addition to this both Iliumzhinov and Ochirov distributed their own newspapers during the election campaign. The fact that the mass media was clearly favouring Iliumzhinov in the period leading up to the election is evidence to his strong finances, but perhaps also to his position among parts of the nomenklatura, although the ruling elite in reality did not possess more than a *de jure* mass media control in this period.²⁹

My analysis thus far has shown that the all-Russian transition processes created a division in the political elite in Kalmykia that translated into support for various candidates at the 1993 election. Contrary to the expectations, the strongest elite support was given to the “outsider candidates”, Iliumzhinov and Ochirov, rather than to the head of the largest interest group. This was evidenced both in lawmaking and in the division of informational resources, and I have argued that the reasoning behind their choice

²⁹ Personal communication with Ivan Ryzhkov, leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia, April 2002.

shows that the actors in this electoral battle seem to have been more important than the structures. Over the next pages I will show how the large private financial resources enabled these “outsiders” to organise extravagant election campaigns against which the candidate from the local nomenklatura did not stand a chance.

5.6. Goals

In terms of election promises Iliumzhinov’s programme was the equivalent of Shapovalov’s programme in Buryatia. Both programmes held great promises and populist statements that sought to satisfy the demands of all parts of the population. The main slogan of the economic programme was the one of a “capitalist revolution”. If people dared to vote for Iliumzhinov they would get a “president–capitalist”—a president ready to act instead of just talking, think in new ways, and even willing to spend parts of his own fortune on improving the people’s lot. Instead of relying on federal transfers Kalmykia would create its own industry based on its own raw materials. However, what would more than anything improve the economic situation was the creation of an offshore zone, offering companies only 5% taxes if they registered in the republic. At the same time people could not expect to get the new welfare without any sacrifices: a 6-day workweek would be introduced. Iliumzhinov’s capitalist image was not coupled with ideas of a political system of the democratic Western brand. By naming his plans for Kalmykia an “economic dictatorship” he seemed to identify more with the modernising dictatorships of South East Asia. A strongly politically mobilised population would only do harm to the economy in this transition period. Therefore he would introduce direct presidential rule, with a ban on demonstrations and strikes in the transition period, and cut the administration down to one third of its present size (Iliumzhinov 1993; *Sovetskaia Kalmykia*, 16 February 1993). The prime minister position was offered to Egor Gaidar.... (*Molodezh Kalmykii*, 16 February 1993). Finally Iliumzhinov—paying tribute to the trend of ethnonational revival—launched the idea of creating a “second Vatican” in Kalmykia, this time for the Lamaist Buddhists, and promised Dalai Lama exile in the republic. But this appeal to the Kalmyk part of the population was carefully balanced with a language of inter-ethnic harmony and generous promises also to other religious communities (*Izvestiia Kalmykii*, 16 February 1993).

Compared to Iliumzhinov’s programme, Ochirov’s programme was the modest variant of many of the same suggestions, and in terms of pragmatism he resembled Aleksandr Ivanov in Buryatia. Where Iliumzhinov described his business successes, Ochirov boasted at his achievements as a Moscow politician and contacts at the federal centre. Among other things he had made the first draft of the first Soviet–American agreement on a reduction of the number of strategic weapons and participated in negotiations between Georgia and South Ossetia and Russia and Chechnya. Concerning concrete political reforms in the programme, Ochirov also went for a more effective and disciplined political administration, but where Iliumzhinov wanted to implement these changes over night Ochirov wanted a gradual reform. Ochirov’s medicine to cure economic illnesses was to a large extent only a

milder prescription of what Iliumzhinov suggested. Among other things he suggested creating a stronger industrial sector based on the republic's own resources, and with state control over the use of resources. Like Iliumzhinov Ochirov also believed in special economic zones with a high degree of tax exemption in order to attract foreign investments. However, unlike Iliumzhinov Ochirov emphasised that one could not expect a quick improvement of the economy. Ochirov's programme differed radically from Iliumzhinov's mainly on the issue of republican sovereignty, where he wanted to exploit the opportunities the Federation Treaty gave to expand the sovereignty. And his military past was evident in his suggestion to build military air bases in Kalmykia, to which Russian soldiers could be transferred from Germany (*Izvestiia Kalmykia*, 19 and 20 February 1993).

Ochirov's programme perhaps sounded more realistic than Iliumzhinov's. Nevertheless, the fact that Iliumzhinov had showed himself to be a clever businessman, whereas Ochirov had no economic background himself, meant that people's confidence in Iliumzhinov's ability to solve their economic problems was higher.³⁰ Iliumzhinov was also guaranteed the support of the Kalmyk Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, but this organisation was far less important than its counterpart in Buryatia. Apart from that, it is difficult to point to important parties and organisations supporting the main candidates, Iliumzhinov and Ochirov, except from some ethnically based organisations that I will look at in Chapter 8 (Guchinova and Tavanets 1994: 8). One reason is that civil society in general was less developed in Kalmykia than in Buryatia. Besides, the largest political party, the Communist Party, boycotted the election.

5.7. Strategies

The age factor was probably important when it came to the election campaign strategies chosen by Iliumzhinov and Ochirov. After all, Ochirov was a seasoned officer who had preserved much of the Soviet way of thinking, whereas Iliumzhinov belonged to the young generation ready to think in new directions about ways of getting to power. In Buryatia the situation had been quite different: There both the main candidates were products of the same Soviet system and none of them thought in strongly unconventional ways, neither about election programmes nor campaigns.

Although Iliumzhinov's programme was sufficiently bold, it was probably the way he organised the election campaign that drew him most of his votes. The layout of his programme was an invention in itself: a printed booklet written in a popularised language. The other candidates did not have a printed programme and Bambaev even failed to put up posters in public places.³¹ The other elements of Iliumzhinov's campaign were no less colourful. In order to impress people living in the backward Kalmyk countryside, Iliumzhinov travelled to every nook and cranny of the republic in a black Lincoln, meeting with people in every *kolkhoz* and village hall with promises of a new and brighter future. Famous Russian artists like Oleg

30 Interview with former speaker of the Narodnyi Khural in Kalmykia, Konstantin Maksimov, in Elista, May 2001.

31 Interview with Ivan Ryzhkov, leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia, Elista, June 2001.

Gazmanov and Masha Rasputina, who normally would not consider adding Elista to their concert plans, were paid by Iliumzhinov to perform there. Further emphasising his own personal wealth he subsidised milk and bread for people in Elista for one month during the election campaign, and promised every citizen 100 US dollars if they voted for him at the election.³² He secured the support of the republican police force by giving them two cars, and convinced the Buddhist and Orthodox congregations to vote for him by presenting them with large donations for *khuruls*³³ and churches.

Ochirov did not have much to offer in response to this. He caught on Iliumzhi-nov's idea to subsidise milk, and he donated money to Afghanistan veterans and vic-tims of the Chernobyl catastrophe, but it was the much more generous subsidies and donations of Iliumzhinov that people remembered (Kasimov 1993: 8). Although Ochirov travelled much around the republic, he was not able to cover as much of the territory with his military helicopter as Iliumzhinov did in his limousine.³⁴ Ochirov was probably the candidate with the best election campaign team—all with experience from his campaign for the Supreme Soviet elections in 1989 (Kasimov 1993: 8)—but even this fact did not help. This team and other Iliumzhinov opponents in the republic made attempts to slander Iliumzhinov by printing stories about him being expelled from MGIMO in his student days for illegal drug dealing (Tolz 1993: 42). The reply from the Iliumzhinov camp was articles in republican mass media portraying Ochirov as a marionette of the federal authorities.³⁵ This was an argument people in Kalmykia could buy into as it turned out that one of Ochirov's clearest weaknesses was the fact that he showed a poor knowledge of the conditions in his home republic.

Ochirov's Achilles' heel was actually to a great extent the fact that he was a general. After all, the 1993 election took place in a period when people had just been witnessing the outbreak of war in many parts of the former Soviet Union. People in Kalmykia, bordering on North Caucasus, sensed the precariousness of their own geo-political position. As one reader of *Elistinskie novosti* (3–9 April 1993) pointed out: “Chechnya and Ingushetia both have president–generals, which more destabilises than stabilises the situation in those republics. Is there any reason to believe the situation would be much different in Kalmykia with Ochirov as a president?” Therefore Ochirov's suggestion to create an air base in Kalmykia probably did more harm than good to his election campaign. Iliumzhinov, on the other hand, spoke of economic co-operation and inter-ethnic harmony, and to the electorate this seemed more appealing.

Here it is important to mention that the time factor did not only work to Ochirov's disadvantage, but also to Iliumzhinov's clear advantage. This was a time when people in Kalmykia still had not completely lost their faith in market liberals who would create economic miracles in a short period of time. Privatisation had begun a year earlier, and the corrupt ways in which it had been conducted so far by the communist nomenklatura was one of the major factors discrediting the whole ruling elite and making people ready for

32 Interview with presidential advisor Vladimir Volgin in Elista, May 2001.

33 Buddhist temples in Kalmykia.

34 Interview with presidential advisor Vladimir Volgin in Elista, May 2001.

35 Interview with former deputy of the State Duma, Bembia Khulkhachiev, Moscow, June 2001.

a “new broom”. O’Donnell argues (1994: 65) that a radical worsening of the economic situation facilitates the emergence of authoritarian leaders believed to provide an effective solution to the crisis. When analysing the election programme and campaign of Iliumzhinov it becomes quite obvious that such a factor was at play here. Iliumzhinov did not even pretend wanting to create a democracy in Kalmykia. What he did seem to want was to improve the rapidly worsening economic conditions in a republic that already had among the worst living standards in Russia. Rapid improvements were what people yearned for—ignoring the fact that Ochirov’s promises perhaps were more realistic.

5.8. The election outcome

In the presidential election in Kalmykia 16 June 1993 Kirsan Iliumzhinov received 65.37% of the votes and became Kalmykia’s first president. Ochirov finished second with 29.22%, whereas only 1.55% voted for Bambaev (Kasimov 1993: 9). This showed that Kalmyks and Russians alike had been taken in by the story of Iliumzhinov’s wealth and successes and his generous election promises, as well as by his skilfully planned election campaign strategy.

According to Gel’man’s typology, the transition in Kalmykia was either a forced transition, *i.e.* elite initiated and with the use of force, or something closer to a revolution, *i.e.* initiated by counter-elites and with the use of force. In my analysis I have argued for perceiving this as a transition that started out as a forced transition, since it is doubtful that Iliumzhinov could have won without his powerful supporters in the republican nomenklatura. They had made it possible for him to get elected as a people’s deputy in 1990. This paved the way for Iliumzhinov by helping him to build up his image in the republican mass media and with opportunities to divert federal funds to his election campaign. In the case of Iliumzhinov we then speak of regime moderates (e.g. the former chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mikhailov) allying with radicals from outside the regime.

Przeworski has little faith in such an alliance, since it seems unlikely that two groups with so different goals will join forces. There is indeed reason to question what made the regime moderates support such a radical candidate as Iliumzhinov, who even proposed to cut the political administration down to a third. It would be safer for them in this respect to ally with the more moderate Ochirov. According to Przeworski (1991: 67–79), alliances with the opposition must in general be based on a guarantee that the elite will not lose all its privileges and most likely this was the case in Kalmykia. Probably the elites believed that the young and politically inexperienced Iliumzhinov could be used more or less like a marionette, while the elites preserved their old power. Here they may have been mistaken. In my discussion of the consolidation phase in Kalmykia in Chapter 7 I will show that it is possible to claim that although the transition started out as a forced transition it ended in a revolution when Iliumzhinov got the upper hand over his patrons in the elite. According to my initial assumption such a mode of transition has the least chances of resulting in a democratic outcome.

6. Regime consolidation in Buryatia

6.1. The executive power in Buryat legislation

According to the Russian Constitution of 1993, one of the rights national republics possess that other federal subjects lack is the right to adopt their own constitution (Article 5, Paragraph 2). The republics are among other things entitled to establish their own political system, under the precondition that the system does not contradict the principles of the Federal Constitution and laws (Article 77, Paragraph 1). This has opened up for a variety of political regimes, and in this chapter I will look into the alternative that has been consolidated in the Republic of Buryatia.

The Constitution of the Republic of Buryatia was adopted 22 February 1994, prior to the first presidential election in the republic. Together with republican laws, decrees and other legal documents that later specified the content of the constitution, the constitution is the formal basis for the political system in Buryatia. The analysis I will now make of this legal framework will provide me with a basis for considering how it has influenced the nature of the regime that later has been consolidated.

The division of power is the basis of the political system in Buryatia (Article 5, Paragraph 1) as of the federal system and on the whole there is reason to claim that the Republican Constitution preserves the main principles outlined in the Federal Constitution for the organisation of the legislative and executive powers (Ivailovskii 1999: 89). What is interesting for me to investigate is whether the three branches of power balance each other, or whether the constitution here, as in most other federal subjects, provides a basis for a strong executive power.

Presidential prerogatives

One feature of the political system in Buryatia that makes it different from the one in most other republics and in the federation as a whole is the fact that the president has the dual role of being president and head of government. There is no separate premier (Article 69, Paragraph 1). This already shows that the president in Buryatia is more than a figurehead. As head of government the president has great influence over the day-to-day policy-making by taking initiatives and co-ordinating government activities. He does not run the risk of strong premiers emerging as contenders for the executive power. The constitution also gives the president the right as head of government to appoint and dismiss government members and establish ministries and state committees. He is entitled to annul decisions made by ministries, committees and other executive organs if they contradict the constitution and laws of the republic or presidential decrees. It is also the president who appoints the chairmen of the National Bank of Buryatia, the Constitutional, Supreme and Arbitration Courts and all judges on the *raion* level (Article 74).

In my theoretical discussion I showed how Matthew Shugart emphasises the reactive and proactive powers of the president as the definition marks of strong and weak presidential powers. According to the Buryat Constitution the president can make law proposals and exercise a postponing veto on laws adopted by the legislative body. After such a veto the original law has to be voted for by 2/3 of the elected deputies in the parliament in order to overrule the presidential veto (Article 74). Thus, the president possesses reactive powers, albeit weak ones as his veto powers are not absolute. In addition to the reactive powers, the president of Buryatia has the power to issue decrees, but laws adopted by the republican legislature can subsequently overrule them (Article 75). It is worth mentioning that the veto and decretal powers are exactly the same as for the Russian president (*Russian Constitution*, Articles 90, 107). Finally, the president has the right to declare a state of emergency in the republic (Article 74), which contradicts federal law.

Both according to the Constitution of Buryatia (Article 76) and the Federal Constitution (Article 98) the president of the republic is with some exceptions immune from arrest and investigations during his presidential period.

Limits on the presidential power

The factors outlined above show that the president of Buryatia according to the 1994 Constitution possesses strong powers. An interesting question is then to see to what extent the other branches of power are entitled to check the executive power.

First I will look briefly at what direct limitations there are on the president's power. Article 70 in the Buryat Constitution prohibits the president from being president and member of parliament at the same time, as well as from being a member of or having a position within political parties and NGOs after he has been elected. This article aims at ensuring that the president will be independent of the other power branches and of interest groups (Burkova *et al.* 1996: 102).

The constitution also seeks to prevent authoritarianism. It states that the president cannot serve more than two subsequent terms of four years (Article 71, Paragraph 2). The rules determining who can be elected as president are fairly restrictive, as the president has to be a citizen of the republic who has been living there for more than 10 years, and for at least three years continuously at the moment of the election. The law violates the Federal Constitution by demanding that the president commands both official languages in the republic, Russian and Buryat³⁶ (Article 71, Paragraph 1). These restrictions limit the number of potential candidates quite drastically but were adopted with the intention of ensuring that the president is someone well familiar with the republic's needs, including its special ethnic make-up.

³⁶ Amended in November 2000. In the first presidential election in 1994 this rule was not applied. Interview with Iurii Fedorov, lecturer in law at the Buryat State University, January 2001.

The legislative power

In Buryatia the 65 members of the legislative body, the Narodnyi Khural, draw their legitimacy from the same source as the president by being elected through secret direct elections according to the majoritarian system (Budaeva *et al.* 1998: 17–18). Like the president the members of parliament are also immune from arrest and investigations during the period they are elected, except in special cases (Article 85). According to Stepan and Skach (1993: 3–4), the fact that both the president and the legislature are directly elected is one of the perils of presidentialism, leading to potential executive–legislative deadlock. In that respect it is interesting to note that the Buryat Constitution does not provide any other safety valves than allowing parliament to overrule presidential vetoes in the case of deadlock: The president cannot dissolve parliament and call early elections (Ivailovskii 1999: 90).

Furthermore, Linz (1996) warns against over-powerful executives where the impeachment procedures are complicated at the same time as the president easily can overrule the legislature. In Buryatia the president can, despite his immunity, be impeached when he violates the constitution or the laws of the republic. This is, however, a long and cumbersome process that is initiated by the Khural, then it proceeds to the Supreme and Constitutional Courts and finally it must be supported by a 2/3 vote in parliament (Articles 77, 91) This more or less corresponds with the impeachment procedures defined by the Russian Constitution, but at the federal level the two chambers of the legislature both have to vote with a 2/3 majority, which further complicates the matter (Article 93). Moreover, in Buryatia the parliament can vote no confidence against individual government members (Article 86). This makes it far easier to carry out votes of no confidence than at the federal level where this vote can be used against the government but not against individual members of it.

Concerning the opportunities for the president to overrule the legislature, I have already mentioned his veto and decree powers. In addition to this, the government checks the parliament by demanding that all law projects concerning taxes and changes in the republic's financial obligations need the approval of the government (Articles 86, 93)—a right that is not granted to the federal government. At the same time, the Buryat Constitution also gives the legislature fairly broad rights to check decisions made by the government. Their consent is required for the appointment or dismissal of government members, the chairman of the national bank and the chairmen of the courts (Article 74). Furthermore, the parliament controls the “day-to-day” activities of the government by checking whether the government implements the parliament's laws and decisions. The government has to present to the parliament a programme of its planned activities and at least once a year the government is obliged to report on its budgetary activities at a parliamentary session (Articles 86, 93).

All in all these powers make the Narodnyi Khural stronger versus the president than the Duma is versus the Russian president, since at the federal level the president has the right to dissolve parliament, and since the rules for impeachment and for voting no confidence against the government are very complicated (*Russian Constitution*, Article 117).

The judicial power

The third power branch, balancing both the power of the executive and legislative powers, is the judicial system. The constitution states that the courts possess all judicial power in the republic (Article 97). Furthermore the judges are independent, immune and have guarantees against dismissal. This guarantees that the two other power branches cannot infringe upon the judicial power and prevent objective decision-making. A consequence of this is that the Buryat president has no power over the appointment of the republican procurator (attorney general) and federal judges. The General Procurator of the Russian Federation appoints the procurator with the consent of the republican parliament, whereas the Russian president appoints federal judges, again pending the consent of the Narodnyi Khural. In general the courts and the procurator, except for the Buryat Constitutional Court, are under federal responsibility (Articles 86, 103). The president only has the right, with parliament's consent, to appoint the chairmen of the Supreme, Arbitration and Constitutional Courts of the republic, whereas the Khural appoints the other judges of the Constitutional Court. The president also appoints judges for all courts on the municipal level (Articles 74, 86).

In order to defend the constitution and ensure that no republican laws or decrees contradict it, the republic has its own Constitutional Court. Furthermore, Chapters 1, 2 and 10 of the Buryat Constitution can only be changed by gathering a Constitutional Assembly. Such a decision requires the support of at least 3/4 of all parliament representatives, which is less than what is required on the federal level. Other parts of the constitution, such as the chapters on the division of power between the executive, legislative and judicial powers, have a weaker status, but changing them still demands the support of 2/3 of the parliament members. The president—unlike the Russian president—has a postponing veto here as well, and in order for parliament to overrule his veto at least 3/4 of all members of parliament have to vote in favour of the first version (Articles 112–114). This shows that compared to the Federal Constitution (Articles 135, 136) the Buryat Constitution provides a weaker defence against potential arbitrary constitutional amendments.

To sum up: according to the Buryat Constitution the executive power emerges as the strongest power branch by possessing both proactive and weak reactive powers, simultaneously also being head of government and by being protected by strong immunity. Nevertheless, the parliament comes out favourably compared to the State Duma by possessing the right to vote no confidence against members of the government instead of the whole government and because the president has no right to dissolve the parliament. On balance, the president in Buryatia seems to have somewhat weaker powers than does the Russian president. This should imply that the political processes also are more democratic in Buryatia than at the federal level. The capacity of the other power branches to control the executive power, however, depends a lot on the degree to which the day-to-day control of the government's activities works. This is the subject I will turn to now.

6.2. The president and alternative power centres

Lack of transparency

When conducting my field studies in Buryatia in January 2001, I asked a Buryat friend his opinion of politics in his home republic. “Nobody engages in politics unless they are interested in making private economic gains from it. Politics is about dividing the riches between interested parties”, was his cynical reply. Indeed, according to O’Donnell, weaknesses in a seemingly democratic constitutional system can pave the way for undemocratic practices, such as corruption and clientelism.

In the case of Buryatia there are plenty of examples of patron–client relationships between political and economic actors. One commercial structure that has received special protection from the government is “AO Motom”, led by the 28-year-old businessman Vitalii Morozov. In 1997 the government exempted this business from paying taxes. Republican newspapers later discovered that federal transfers were put into the Motom Bank and then kept there for several months. Both the bank and the government benefited from this, the latter in terms of a large interest (Tivanenko 1998: 55–57). To make the ties between new businesses and the government even closer, the president at one stage even wanted to appoint Morozov as minister of foreign economic relations (*Inform Polis*, 30 July 1998).

Another example of the lack of transparency in public life is the privatisation process, which in Buryatia started in 1992. This was right when the old political system in the republic was falling apart and strong control mechanisms thus were lacking. When the new political system was established in 1993–95 and privatisation continued there were too many interested parties around in the state apparatus to allow such mechanisms to be established. Instead their focus was on having the right allies in the right places.

One example to illustrate this is the privatisation struggle in Ulan-Ude. Already in 1992 the republican authorities came into conflict with the city authorities in Ulan-Ude over transferring the ownership of some municipal property to the republican level (Tivanenko 1998: 95). The city soviet was dissolved following the crisis in Moscow in 1993. Moreover, only a couple of days after the presidential election in 1994 the Ulan-Ude mayor was dismissed by the president. The reason seems to have been that the mayor publicly had shown his dislike of Potapov, and as there was no law on local self-government at that time, no one could prevent Potapov from dismissing him.³⁷ The man who replaced him, Aleksandr Lubsanov, was a former colleague of Potapov at the railway repair factory. After this the republican Supreme Soviet and city authorities conducted several dubious transactions of city property; sometimes almost for free to commercial structures, other times mortgaged to help commercial structures obtain bank loans. One example of the latter was Hotel Odon: The company they assisted when the hotel was mortgaged received the credit and then disappeared. The fact that Potapov quite openly supported Lubsanov at the mayoral election in Ulan-Ude in 1995—although, according to the law, he is not allowed to interfere in municipal elections—shows the close ties between the republican and city

³⁷ Personal communication with researcher Liudmila Itigilova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, April 2002.

executives. When Lubsanov lost the election he was offered the position as head of the government administration (Tivanenko 1998: 93–102).

The practices I have described above show that, despite constitutionally guaranteed control mechanisms, money and property in Buryatia have indeed been dealt with in ways that seem to confirm my friend's claim that "politics is about dividing the riches between interested parties". An interesting question is whether the parliament members could not influence what was happening, or whether they themselves were one of these interested parties. This will become clearer when I now turn to looking at alternative power centres, one of which is the parliament.

The Narodnyi Khural: Real contender or a "pretty decoration"?

According to the Buryat Constitution the parliament is supposed to check regularly on the activities of the government, assisted by special organs such as the Audit Chamber and the legal apparatus. The lack of a proper horizontal accountability, however, has been a recurring complaint from parliament members in the relationship to the executive power. In 1995 they were aired in a newspaper interview with the Khural member Vladimir Markov. The interview was called "Pretty Decoration or Functioning Democratic Mechanism?" (*Buriatiia*, 19 April 1995). At this stage the frustrations concerned the debate around changes in the new Republican Constitution, aiming at increasing the parliament's opportunities to check the president's powers. The president kept delaying the amendment by constantly asking for changes in the proposals, and the parliamentarians had to face accusations that the proposals were an attempt at power usurpation.

In the autumn of 1997 a major president–parliament conflict arose when among others the old Potapov opponent, Vladimir Saganov, accused the government of irresponsibility when it offered to act as a guarantor for weak commercial and state structures. This came up when the Khural debated the use of the so-called "gold credit". This was a mortgage on 750 kilos of gold received from the federal authorities in 1995. It was supposed to be spent by the republican government on lending companies money with the aim to increase the output of precious metals in the republic, but most of the credit was used for completely different purposes. The outcome of the debate showed how vulnerable the Khural is in its relationship to the executive power. The Khural voted no confidence against the government but the first vote was dismissed for "technical reasons". When the parliamentarians reassembled for a new ballot the next day the vote had suddenly turned in favour of the government (Tivanenko 1998: 44–47, 126–130).

Allegedly, the reason for this change of minds was that some 30% of the members of the first Khural received their salaries from the government administration. Republican law even allowed government members simultaneously to serve as Khural deputies (Zverev 1998: 8). An analysis of the background of the parliament members elected in 1994 shows that the dominant group was people working within the executive power on the central and regional levels in the republic, ten of which were heads of *raion* administrations. Nine were *kolkhoz* or *sovkhos* directors, or worked in small and medium-sized agricultural industries and another 13 were directors of

large Soviet factories, although only three of these factories remained state owned in 1994 (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 62). Despite the fact that private businesses had existed for some years in Buryatia, the new businessmen were virtually non-existent in the first Khural. The *raion* heads and the deputies from the agricultural sector represented sectors that were strongly dependant on money transfers, and many of them got their personal salary directly from the republican treasury. Furthermore, the president could assert influence over private enterprises through his power to distribute credits.³⁸ As the “gold credit” case shows, this dependency made the deputies vulnerable to pressure during important votes in parliament and seriously reduced the chances that the Khural could vote no confidence against the government—as it reduced the possibility to vote for anything at all that would harm the executive power.

The parliament in Buryatia has nevertheless in some instances overruled the president’s decisions. For instance, when Potapov suggested appointing Morozov for the minister position he was not accepted by the Khural. The Khural also denied the president support in the court cases against the mayor of Ulan-Ude Valerii Shapova-lov in 1996–97 that will be described in 6.2.4. In December 1997 the Khural stopped the presidential initiative to make constitutional amendments that would have created a separate prime minister position in the republic (Tivanenko 1998: 179–180). In my legal analysis I argued that the fact that the president also is head of government strengthens his position, but in many cases it will be convenient for the president to have a premier to transfer the blame for political failures on to. In the case of Buryatia many parliamentarians claimed the president’s move was an attempt to disclaim responsibility for the economic crisis in the republic.

The conflict level in the Narodnyi Khural in Buryatia is nevertheless low. This is, however, not only a result of the dependency described above. The fact that a large group among the deputies represent the industry and the municipalities gives them rich opportunities to make decisions benefiting their own sector. That mutual benefit characterises the executive-legislative relationship in Buryatia was indeed my impression when conducting interviews in the Khural in January 2001. There was no lack of politicians who were critical of the president, but at the same time nobody wanted to criticise him openly the way the opposition in Kalmykia does.

It is also worth noticing that in the new parliament only eight deputies had been members of the Supreme Soviet, and another three members of the Council of Ministers, but 17 of those elected from the *raions* had been members of the *raispolkom/gorispolkom*.³⁹ Thus, altogether nearly half of the Khural members had a past from Soviet political organs (Krianev 1997). The high degree of continuity from the old Communist elite to the new political elite reduces the chances that serious political change will be implemented (Hughes 2000: 43).

The tendency of continuity in the organs of political power was perhaps even clearer when one looks at what kind of people Potapov put into the presidential administration and government. Several of the people who had been

³⁸ Interview with anonymous deputy of the Narodnyi Khural, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

³⁹ Executive committee that was the permanently working body of the local or city Supreme Soviet.

the most active defenders of Potapov in the Supreme Soviet in the dramatic October days in 1993 now got paid for their efforts: Lidia Nimaeva was appointed vice-president, and Revomir Garmaev became administrator of affairs (*upravliaiushchii delami*). Several other former members of the Supreme Soviet soon also found a position in the presidential administration (Mikhailovskaia 1995: 61).

Thus, the political elite in the republic remained profoundly Soviet, bringing together mainly old nomenklatura members and people from large Soviet enterprises. The latter were represented by the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, which under the leadership of Aleksandr Korenev supported Potapov until late in his first presidential period. Below the personal conflicts in the top echelons of power, where some of those who lost—like presidential candidate Ivanov—left the republic, the level of turbulence remained low. The relatively low level of elite replacement means that the Buryat transition does not fulfil the requirements of a “struggle-according-to-the-rules” solution that draws upon both elites and counter-elites. Instead it is closer to being an elite association, where a dominating actor—Potapov and his entourage—sets the conditions, but where there is a high degree of consensus and mutual benefits for the actors in the system. The system is close to Stoner-Weiss’ model for a political system facilitating high governance performance also because of the strong role played by Potapov’s old colleagues from the railway repair factory. But again, one difference here will be that the co-operation is on terms favouring the political actors more than the economic actors.

The judicial power: Inconsistent helper

The patron–client networks and elite alliances have the potential to extend into the judicial power, and the next question is to what extent the legal apparatus is able to work as independently as foreseen by the constitution. As described by, among others, Vladimir Shalpentokh (1997), an unholy alliance of executive power and judicial power is not uncommon in Russian federal subjects. Together they prevent opposition and independent mass media from illuminating the murky waters of financial transactions in the republics and gaining access to power.

In Buryatia the legal institutions in the republic have shown considerable independence, although inconsistently. For instance, against the will of the president, the republican tax police started investigations against the company “Motom”, and managed to conduct a raid against the bank, despite the president’s threat to remove the head of the tax police if this happened (Tivanenko 1998: 56). In the case of the first court trial against Ulan-Ude Mayor Shapovalov in 1996 the municipal court supported Shapovalov, despite the fact that the president elects the court members. Subsequently Shapovalov was also acquitted in 1997 when new accusations were brought against him. This time around the president had been assisted by the republican MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs), the procurator, the secret police FSB, and even the Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Iurii Skuratov (who is Potapov’s childhood friend) (*ibid.*: 110–111).

In other cases the legal apparatus has seemed to give in to government pressure too easily. One example is the case of the “gold credit” in 1995. The scandal around the use of this credit led one parliament member to demand the dismissal of vice-premier Zhil'tsov. This was prevented by the republican procurator who conducted purely “formal” investigations against Zhil'tsov that did not succeed in finding strong evidence against him (*ibid.*: 128). The republican procurator and police forces have been siding with Potapov particularly often. According to federal and republican law the Buryat president has no formal influence over the appointment of the procurator. The case of the Buryat procurator is, however, a good example of how patron–client networks also influence the legal apparatus. What determined the outcome here was the personal bond between the Russian Procurator General at that time, Skuratov, and Potapov. Via this contact Potapov was able to ensure that a loyal procurator was elected. The Khural did at first not want to support this candidate, but finally gave in to pressure from Potapov and Skuratov (Zverev 1998: 9).

The republic versus the municipalities: The battle over Ulan-Ude

As mentioned, Potapov actively attempted to exploit his support in parts of the legal apparatus in the battle against the Ulan-Ude mayor, Shapovalov, and I find it useful for the purpose of my analysis to take a closer look at this battle.

By being directly elected the mayor and municipal organs have a legitimacy and basis for independence vis-à-vis the republican level. Gel'man (2000: 105–106) has pointed out that in particular where the regional capital plays an important role for the region's economy, the municipal authorities may turn into a strong alternative power centre. As Ulan-Ude is housing the bulk of Buryatia's large enterprises, this could give the municipality considerable leverage in the case of a republic–municipality conflict, provided that the enterprises would side with the municipality. For a while, though, as described in 6.2.1, patron–client ties rather than conflict characterised the relationship between Ulan-Ude and the republican executive power.

Conflict started only when Ulan-Ude Mayor Lubsanov lost the election in December 1995. The new mayor, Shapovalov, had, as described above, lost against Potapov in the presidential election the year before. He was nevertheless dangerous to Potapov not least because he managed to draw votes from potential Potapov voters in Ulan-Ude. Shapovalov was elected on a programme that defined him—through comparisons with the existing elite—as a new and energetic broom, unspoiled by nomenklatura privileges, and thus a person truly interested in improving people's well being (*Pravda Buriatii*, 9 December 1995). There were resilient rumours of a criminal past and illegal business activities, though, and plenty of unpopular policy measures such as when Shapovalov started paying doctors and teachers their salaries through credit cards at a time when the bank system was still poorly developed.⁴⁰ Besides, Shapovalov's campaign to weaken the government's legitimacy was hardly appreciated by Potapov. The two sides in the struggle

⁴⁰ Personal communication with researcher Liudmila Itigilova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, April 2002.

started constantly blaming the other for everything that went wrong in the republic, like wage arrears.

Potapov, thus, decided to use the legal apparatus to oust Shapovalov. In October 1996 Potapov issued a decree to remove Shapovalov for having failed to prepare the city properly for the winter. Shapovalov won the following court trial in January, but was not allowed back into office. Instead the president issued a new decree. The deputy chair of the State Duma Committee on Local Self-Government, Sergei Mitrokhin, arrived in Ulan-Ude to look into the conflict, and declared that the dismissal of Shapovalov was illegal (Tivanenko 1998: 102–109). Shapovalov was nevertheless removed from power. Still, he continued his propaganda against the president, which provoked Potapov to put him in jail for “public offence against the president”. This argument was also turned down by the courts (*ibid.*: 9).

The long-winded conflict between Potapov and Shapovalov made it clear what parts of the legal apparatus sided with Potapov. When Potapov eventually managed to dismiss Shapovalov the strongest alternative power centre had been neutralised.

Party life: Dealing with the “traitor”

The Potapov–Shapovalov conflict showed the importance of strong personalities in republican politics. One further factor that needs to be evaluated is the role of political parties as alternative power centres. Democracy theory emphasises the importance of a strong civil society and party pluralism as a counterweight to the executive power (e.g. Dahl 1971). However, despite some regional variations, civil society and political parties in Russian federal subjects were nowhere particularly strong after decades of “atomisation” of the Soviet society. In addition to this, many regional leaders acted to restrain organisational freedoms.

In Buryatia civil society and parties have been allowed to develop quite freely in the post-Soviet period. A local political scientist boasts that Buryatia has no less than 26 registered political parties, which, in his opinion, is proof to significant political pluralism.⁴¹ When taking a closer look at these parties, however, one discovers that only a dozen of them have more than a handful of active members. Almost without exceptions they have all merely been mayflies in the political life of the republic, with minimal political leverage. Party life in Buryatia mirrors the broader federal party development, where parties have a tendency to emerge around strong political leaders, and then disappear when the political conjuncture changes.⁴²

The only exception to this is the Communist Party, which can be explained by its strong point of departure compared to all other political movements. Furthermore, the Communist Party turned into the “party of power” in Buryatia when Potapov was elected in 1994. This turned out to both good and bad for the Party, however, due to Potapov’s own ambivalence concerning where to position himself politically. First he realised that

41 Interview with political scientist Boris Krianev, Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

42 Interview with political scientist Erdem Dagbaev, Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

too strong connections with the political left wing would harm his relationship with the federal authorities, and encouraged people to vote for Boris Yeltsin at the 1996 presidential election. This alienated a large part of the Communist Party members in Buryatia—who in general thought Potapov's policies betrayed socialist principles—and split the party into three fractions (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 106). What really divided the ranks of the Communist Party, however, was when Potapov again switched sides at the beginning of 1997 and asked for a renewed membership in the Party. One third of the members left the Party after this. The peak of the conflict came when a special meeting of the council of the People's Patriotic Union of Russia (NPSR—a party bloc including the Communist Party) voted for impeachment of the president and the speaker of the parliament, Nikolai Semionov, for having voted for selling and buying land at a meeting in the Federation Council in February 1998. The NPSR proposal did not, however, achieve the required support in the parliament for an impeachment process to be launched (Tivanenko 1998: 76–91).

The conflict showed that Potapov was treading a fine line when attempting not to alienate the federal centre and at the same time preserving his legitimacy among the people who had voted for him. One can ask why the president did not use more force to make the political parties serve his interests, when this was done in many other regions. The answer may be that when observing the proliferation of weak parties in the republic, this did not really seem to have been necessary. Instead, he opted for curbing mass media.

Mass media: Putting the lid back on the jar

Since elected president, Potapov has not been quite able to resist the temptation to put his hands on the freedom of speech. The conflicts between the republican authorities and mass media are always stronger in the period leading up to elections, and this is a common phenomenon virtually in all Russian federal subjects.⁴³ This was probably a major reason why the state-run TV company BGTRK was forced to change its leadership in 1998. The chairman of the board of the company was replaced with the former press secretary of the president.

Mary Mc Auley has pointed out that mass media is a particular threat to the executive power if it is based on a strong resource base (1997: 312) and in Buryatia it has proved particularly vital to control mass media in important battles with alternative power centres in the republics. Most crucial here was again the conflict between the city authorities of Ulan-Ude and the government in 1995–97. The mouthpiece of the city authorities was the radio channel Ulan-Ude-tsentr. A TV channel, Tivikom, and two newspapers, *Vsedlia Vas* and *Ulan-Ude-fakt*, were also threatened with closure in the Shapovalov–Potapov struggle. The peak of grievances against Ulan-Ude-tsentr was, however, reached in the battle with another alternative power centre, the legislature. In the autumn of 1997 the radio channel reported from the Khural session where the use of the “gold credit” was debated, and was forced to close down soon afterwards (Tivanenko 1998: 165–173).

⁴³ Interview with Boris Timoshenko, monitoring network supervisor at the Glasnost Defence Foundation, Moscow, May 2001.

This shows that the republican authorities indeed fear the potential power of the “fourth state power”. Where the discrepancy between formal and informal politics is large, the authorities are also as a consequence more interested in controlling or strangling mass media. This focus on media control is strongest in periods when the regime’s legitimacy is particularly at stake: in battles with other potential power centres such as parties, legislature or municipalities. The case of Buryatia shows that when choosing between curbing press freedoms and organisational freedoms, the former is more effective at least when civil society is weak and the republic is quite rural. What further made it unnecessary to curb organisational freedoms in Buryatia was the fact that the only major party was the Communist Party, and this party was already siding with the president.

6.3. 1998: Regime consolidated

I have now shown the interrelationship between different power centres in Buryatia in the period from the first presidential election in 1994 to the second in 1998. At the time of the second election, the alternative power centres that existed were the half-autonomous legislative and judicial powers, whereas the mayor of Ulan-Ude was again loyal to the president. The free mass media had been more and more silenced. The only party worth mentioning was the Communist Party, but also this party was seriously weakened. The next question will be how this influenced the election that was scheduled for 1998.

In the presidential campaign Potapov this time had nine opponents. His most serious opponent was his former colleague and leader of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Korenev, but Potapov was also contested by some candidates who had challenged him earlier, such as Shapovalov and Saganov. The competition was from the outset restricted by the Republican Constitution, which limits the range of candidates to citizens of the republic who can speak both Buryat and Russian. Not long ahead of the election this paragraph was contested by the leader of the Buryat electoral commission, who got the Khural’s support in asserting that the Russian Constitution ought to be followed. As a consequence, she was replaced by another old colleague of Potapov from the railway repair factory (Pak 1998: 37).

A major difference between this campaign and the previous one was the size of the resources used by the candidates and the campaign technology taken into use. As described in Chapter 4, in the first campaign the two main candidates had had quite equal resources at hand, and employed no spectacular election campaign technology. This time the campaign was a different story: Potapov allegedly put 2.5–3 million dollars into his campaign, whereas Korenev was said to have spent around 10 million dollars on his. These figures may be as much a part of the campaign propaganda as real figures, but the candidates must nevertheless have spent considerably larger sums on their campaigns than before. The money went among other things to Moscow-based image-makers (*Inform Polis*, 25 June 1998).

Concerning Potapov’s campaign, the information he spread partly aimed at slandering his opponents, partly at painting a rosy picture of himself as the protector of socialist ideals and inter-ethnic harmony. Special newspapers

were sent out to every household in the republic slandering Saganov and Korenev (this tactic was popularly called “Saganovshchina”).⁴⁴ The image-maker companies, in explaining why Potapov won, emphasised that a great advantage for Potapov was the fact that he was an experienced politician, possessing an election campaign team where many had experience from the previous campaign. Compared to this, the two other candidates who employed image-makers, Ochirov and Korenev, had to rely much more on Moscow image-makers, who lacked a thorough knowledge of Buryatia (*ibid.*).

Above I have shown that local mass media gradually ended up in the government’s pocket, and as the elections drew closer, the more evident this became. Of the three republican TV channels, one was closed before the election, Arig Us changed leadership, and BGTRK was already pro-president. Analyses of republican newspapers during ten days of the election campaign show that for each publication that was against Potapov, there were five supporting him (Pak 1998: 39). In addition to this Potapov took measures to push some of his opponents to withdraw from the campaign. Right before the end of the campaign even Korenev withdrew, without making his motives for withdrawing public. Rumours went that the Potapov faction was ready to publicise facts about Korenev’s business activities that would give them a reason to start investigations against him in the same way as they did with Shapovalov at the last elections (Kislov 1998b: 3). This time Shapovalov was allowed to run, but wicked tongues suggested that this was because he was not considered a dangerous contender to Potapov any more, but could rather help drawing votes away from more serious contenders. The former chairman of the Council of Ministers, Vladimir Saganov, refused to accept the position as speaker of the parliament as a compensation for withdrawing. For him as for many other candidates, however, lack of finances and a good election team offered him no real chances this time, not even in his home region of Tunkinsk (*Inform Polis*, 2 July 1998).

This shows that Potapov, by possessing the highest political power in the republic, held resources that made it impossible for the other candidates to compete with him. Korenev was his only serious contender, since only he, through his contact with the economic elite in Buryatia, could put sufficient economic resources into the campaign. This did not suffice, however, against Potapov’s administrative resources. I have shown how Potapov barred an amendment of the constitution and thereby prevented strong Moscow candidates from participating. Furthermore he exploited his influence over the republican procurator and the police to threaten Korenev with court trials.

6.4. Conclusion

The fact that Potapov was able to win the election again in 1998—this time with 68%—shows to what extent he had managed to consolidate his power during his four years of presidency. The 1998 election made it clear that the

⁴⁴ Interview with sociologist Galina Manzanova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, February 2001. Adding -schchina to someone’s surname is a way of alluding to terror and persecution. To my knowledge it refers to the so-called *Ézhovshchina*, which was the Stalinist terror 1937–38.

regime now was consolidated: At the election no candidate had been able to put up serious competition, and the political opposition seemed weaker and more dispersed than ever. Although a degree of pluralism existed in 1998, this in no way seemed threatening to the regime.

The development after 1998 further underscores this fact. The composition of the new parliament elected in 1998 shows that the idea of a Buryat elite association does seem like a very appropriate description of the relationship between political and economic elites in Buryatia. While the new business elite had hardly been represented in the first Khural, they got 13 deputies elected to the second. Of the 65 old deputies only 16 were re-elected. Seven of these were heads of *raion* administrations, and this group have altogether 11 representatives in the new Khural. Another ten deputies are directors of enterprises, and it is interesting to note that with only a couple of exceptions the directors in the old Khural were replaced with other directors (Pravitel'stvo Respubliki Buriatii 2000). Thus, although the degree of replacement from the first to the second Khural was very high, the process of co-optation of economic elites into the political regime only accelerated. 17 of the deputies belong to the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. Still, the Communists have the strongest faction (38 deputies are loyal to NPSR) (*Molodezh Buriatii*, 29 July 1998), but some of the staunchest government critics disappeared. Saganov withdrew from politics altogether (*Inform Polis*, 29 October 1998).

The authorities in Buryatia—members of the government and parliament alike—prefer to talk about the harmonic and peaceful co-operation between the power branches in the republic. But, such a “struggle-according-to-the-rules” image is deceptive. My analysis above has shown that relations have not been that peaceful in Buryatia and the discrepancy between formal and informal politics shows that it can hardly be said that the regime works “according to the rules”. In order to consolidate his administration, Potapov has found it necessary to rely on force as well as on compromise, where the confrontation between Potapov and the mayor of Ulan-Ude was the fiercest power battle. Also the presidential election in 1998 was fought with fierce measures.

Potapov thus acts as the dominant actor in Buryatia, setting the terms of co-operation, and therefore the regime he has created suits the description of an “elite association” regime. The fact that co-operation is an option has prevented Buryatia from turning into a “winner-takes-all” regime with the potential of alienating large groups in society. My assumption in Chapter 1 was that a difference in the strength of non-governmental structures has contributed to the regime differences between Buryatia and Kalmykia. Above I suggested that not so much the strength of the non-governmental structures as the opportunity to co-opt them into the regime is important, and this will become even clearer when I now shall contrast the situation in Buryatia with the regime consolidation in Kalmykia.

7. Regime Consolidation in Kalmykia “The State—that is I”

7.1. The executive power in Kalmyk legislation

Kalmykia differs from the other republics in the Russian Federation by having renounced its right, defined by the Russian Constitution, to have its own constitution. The republic thereby also gave up its sovereignty. This happened on 5 April 1994, when, on the initiative of the republic’s President Kirsan Iliumzhinov, the so-called Steppe Code, or Basic Law, replaced the Soviet Constitution from 1978. It does seem, however, that the Kalmyk Steppe Code nevertheless has the same legal status as a constitution, since it is the highest set of Kalmyk laws, subordinated only to the Federal Constitution and laws.

Presidential prerogatives

If assuming that there is a relationship between formal laws and the ways in which politics are conducted, one would expect that since Kalmykia has a less democratic regime than Buryatia, this would be reflected in a constitution and laws that provide the executive branch with stronger powers. This is, indeed, the case with the Kalmyk Steppe Code. It proclaims it as the president’s duty to establish the whole structure of the executive power in the republic but without transgressing the federal legal framework (Article 25). Following from this the president decides when ministries and committees are to be established or abolished. In Buryatia such a decision requires the Khural’s consent (Article 28).

The Kalmyk president appoints the government members, and the government is subordinated to the president. One of Iliumzhinov’s election promises in 1993 had been to introduce direct presidential rule, and, consequently, no separate articles in the Steppe Code are devoted to the government. Thus, its rights and duties are left unspecified, although the parliament is mentioned several places alongside with other institutions. Until October 1995, the government did not even possess the right to initiate laws (Maksimov 1998: 89). We have seen that the president in Buryatia simultaneously also is head of government. In Kalmykia the Steppe Code leaves it open to the president whether he wants to head the government himself or to appoint a prime minister with the Khural’s consent (Article 28)—making arbitrary government appointments and dismissals possible.

Concerning reactive and proactive powers, I showed in my analysis of the Buryat Constitution that the president there has the right to issue decrees and use a postponing veto. In Kalmykia, according to the law defining how laws are being adopted, the president has the right to veto a law but for some reason this is not mentioned in the Steppe Code (Maksimov 1998: 70). The

president does have an explicit right to issue decrees but they must not contradict federal law (Article 25).

One difference between the Buryat and the Kalmyk presidential prerogatives is that the president in Kalmykia possesses the right to dissolve the parliament, but only in the case when one of the president's law projects has been revoked three times by the parliament (Article 28). In this situation the right to dissolve parliament functions as a way out in case of an executive–legislative deadlock, thereby providing a solution against one of the perils of presidentialism.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the two constitutions is that the president's power to appoint and dismiss people is a lot more wide-ranging in Kalmykia than in Buryatia. They include even the heads of state-owned businesses, organisations and institutions. He also has the right to participate in decisions on the make-up of federal organs in the republic and to give his consent to the appointment of their heads (Article 28). Another prerogative of the president is—with the Khural's consent—to declare a state of emergency (Article 28). Finally, the Kalmyk president enjoys legal immunity and can only be arrested or put under investigation if the procurator demands it (Maksimov 1998: 63).

Limits on the presidential power

With such strong presidential prerogatives the checks and balances on the Kalmyk president's power are weak. He is, for instance, elected for seven years (Article 25),⁴⁵ but this contravenes federal law. A president cannot, however, serve more than two subsequent terms. Getting elected in the first place is about as difficult here as in Buryatia. According to the 1991 law “On the election of the President of the Republic of Kalmykia”, a presidential candidate must be between 30 and 60 years old, he must have been living in the republic for at least ten years, and he must speak both state languages (Article 3). But, as mentioned in Chapter 5, an exception was made for professional politicians at the federal level, diplomats and officers. This enabled outsider candidates like Iliumzhinov and Ochirov to participate.

Further suiting Iliumzhinov's personal interests is the fact that, while the Buryat president is obliged to renounce his membership of political parties and NGOs once elected president, the Steppe Code does not require this of the Kalmyk president. This made it possible for Iliumzhinov to get elected president of the World Chess Federation, FIDE, in 1995.

The legislative power

The legislative bodies in Buryatia and Kalmykia share the same name, Narodnyi Khural, but here the similarities end. The Narodnyi Khural in Kalmykia consists of 27 representatives elected for four years⁴⁶ (Article 29). According to the 1994 law “On the election of deputies to the Narodnyi

45 According to the first version of the Steppe Code, the presidential period was five years but in 1995 the Code was amended, extending the period to seven years. In 1998 it was amended again, this time back to a five-year period—bringing the law in tune with federal law. This latter amendment did not affect the current term.

46 Their term was extended to five years in 1998.

Khural (Parliament) of the Republic of Kalmykia in the first session", 18 of the representatives are elected from single member districts according to the majoritarian system. The last 1/3 of the members are elected on proportional lists with the whole republic as one election district and these candidates are nominated by the president (Article 4). This means that at least 1/3 of the representatives are under the president's direct patronage.

The opportunities for the president to appoint people loyal to him are further increased by the fact that the Kalmyk Khural has a considerably weaker right to control appointments and dismissals than in Buryatia. This particularly concerns appointments to republican courts, which I will return to in 7.1.4. Furthermore, the appointment of a head of government requires the consent of the Khural (Article 30), whereas the right to suggest candidates for the position as chairman of the Khural belongs to the president alone (Article 32). As in Buryatia the Kalmyk Khural has the right to appoint members to the republican Election Commission but this right is not confirmed in the Steppe Code (Maksimov 1998: 77).

As for the Kalmyk Khural's legislative and budgetary prerogatives, these more or less correspond to the prerogatives of the Khural in Buryatia. The main exception is the right the Kalmyk Khural has to interpret laws and ensure that they are consistent with the Russian Constitution and Russian laws. This is because the republic does not have a Constitutional Court, as it lacks a constitution (Article 30).

According to the Steppe Code, the Khural lacks the check against over-powerful executives provided through a right to carry out a vote of no confidence against the government or individual members of it. This right is, however, enshrined in the law "On the Narodnyi Khural (Parliament) of the Republic of Kalmykia" of 1994 (Article 11, Paragraph 4). Furthermore, if the Kalmyk president breaks the Steppe Code and his inaugural oath the parliament has the right to start an impeachment process against him. In order to start this process at least 2/3 of the parliament members must vote for it, which is a much stricter threshold than in Buryatia. If the republican Supreme Court agrees with the parliament's conclusions a referendum is required for the president to be impeached (Article 26). In other words, the chances to dismiss a president are minimal. The president, on the other hand, is entitled by the Steppe Code to dissolve the Khural (Article 29).⁴⁷

The judicial power

As in Buryatia the courts are independent and all judges immune and endowed with guarantees against dismissal. Their scope of activity can only be determined by federal law (Article 34). However, their independence from the republican executive is severely restrained by the fact that it is the republican president who presents the Khural with candidates for judges to federal courts and the Arbitration Court in Kalmykia. The Khural can only "express its opinion" on these appointments. The president also selects the candidates for judges to local courts but here the Khural's consent to the president's proposals is at least required for the positions of chairman and vice

⁴⁷ The right does not apply the first 12 months after the Khural is elected nor the last six months before new elections are to take place.

chairmen (Maksimov 1998: 71).⁴⁸ Furthermore, the president must give his consent to the appointment by the Procurator General of the Russian Federation of a procurator in the republic (Article 40), whereas both in Buryatia and according to federal law this right belongs to the Khural (Article 103).

The requirements for how the constitution can be amended are quite similar in Buryatia (Articles 112, 114) and Kalmykia. Certain parts of the Steppe Code require that a Legislative Assembly must convene following a 2/3 vote in the parliament. It is, however, worth noting that in Buryatia a 3/4 vote is required for such an assembly to be convened (Article 44). A Legislative Assembly or a referendum is also required if the Steppe Code is to be abolished in its entirety and a new one adopted.

According to the law “On the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Kalmykia” of 1995, the members of the Assembly consist of the president, the prime minister, the chairmen of the Supreme and Arbitration Courts, all the members of the Khural, 27 members of the executive organs—selected by the president, and seven representatives from each *raion* and 20 from Elista that are selected by the *raion* and city councils (Article 2). In practice this means that the president with his extensive appointment prerogatives more or less controls the Legislative Assembly, even more so as decisions are made through both secret and open votes (Article 10).

To sum up, the Kalmyk and Buryat presidents possess the same proactive and reactive powers to issue decrees and to use a postponing veto. However, the other elements I have discussed show that there is far more to a strong executive power than this criterion defined by Matthew Shugart. The formal power of the Kalmyk president is considerably strengthened by the fact that once he has been elected both the rules for his term in office and impeachment procedures make it more difficult to get rid of him. What makes the president in Kalmykia particularly strong, though, are his wide-ranging powers to establish and abolish political organs such as the government, and to appoint and dismiss people. In my further discussion I will show how these formal powers work in practice when combined with informal ones.

7.2. The president and alternative power centres

Lack of transparency

As the Steppe Code was adopted only after Iliumzhinov was elected, the executive power was highly visible in the constitution-making process in Kalmykia. According to my assumption in Chapter 1, this would ensure far stronger presidential powers than in Buryatia, which I have also shown it did. However, Iliumzhinov abstained from including an absolute veto in the Steppe Code. He even omitted references to the president’s veto powers altogether. One can easily find arguments to support the case that when the Steppe Code was adopted Iliumzhinov had every reason to believe he would get on well without such powers. The fact that the evidence of non-transparent political practices and clientelism abound in Kalmykia is proof of this.

⁴⁸ This contravenes federal law by excluding the federal level in decisions on appointments of judges to federal courts, and the law had to be amended in 1998.

During the election campaign in 1993 two of Iliumzhinov's most remarkable ideas were the "Corporation Kalmykia" and the plan to turn Kalmykia into an offshore zone. These ideas are the best examples of the non-existing boundary between public and private in Kalmyk politics. The investment corporation "Kalmykia" was registered in July 1993, with the aim to temporarily renationalise large industries that had been privatised. The oil and gas resources, some of the largest companies and the largest *sovkhoses* were brought into the corporation, where people were encouraged to invest their privatisation vouchers (*Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 19 June 1993; *Pravda*, 1 September 1993). Business people who refused to co-operate with the government got into trouble with the tax authorities and other controlling agencies, and were eventually forced to leave Kalmykia. By the end of 1993 the republican authorities therefore controlled a higher percentage (96%) of the economic assets in Kalmykia than in any other federal subject⁴⁹ (Shlapentokh *et al.* 1997: 171).

The ease with which Iliumzhinov could gather the major resources and companies in Kalmykia under his control, indicates how weak these structures were. There was a Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in Kalmykia, as well, that had supported Iliumzhinov at the presidential election, but this organisation must have been a far weaker partner to the president than the corresponding Buryat organisation. Furthermore, privatisation had only just started in Kalmykia. It started for real only in the latter half of 1992 (Guchinova 1997: 38–39) and the actors involved were either given a share in the new economic regime or too weak to resist the renationalisation.

Nowhere is business in Kalmykia as non-transparent as in the dealings concerning the offshore zone. It was established in January 1995, when the Narodnyi Khural adopted laws that exempted businesses from outside the republic from paying most taxes, as long as they paid at least 1250 ecu per quarter to be registered in Kalmykia. In this way the companies avoided paying taxes both in their home region and to a large extent in Kalmykia.⁵⁰ In the following years, several companies were established to administer the Kalmyk offshore zone. The registration fee businesses paid for using these companies' services did not go through the republican budget. Consequently, it was kept out of control for federal controlling institutions. The size of the incomes from the offshore zone was kept secret until 1998. The same was the case with the extra-budgetary funds that kept the revenues from the offshore zone to be used by Iliumzhinov and his entourage, such as the "Fund for the Programmes of the President of RK" (Ryzhkov 1998a: 2; 1998b: 1, 1998e: 1–2).

With his close to complete control over the Kalmyk economy and the large revenues that are never taxed, Iliumzhinov is quite right when he immodestly proclaims: "Kalmykia—that is I" (*Persona*, October 1997). I will now investigate to what extent the emergence of this sultanistic regime in Kalmykia can be explained through the relationship between the executive power and alternative power centres.

49 The federal subjects on average possessed 22% of all privatised property in their region.

50 Interview with Valerii Badmaev, deputy leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia, Elista, May 2001.

The Narodnyi Khural: Hostage or beneficiary?

Considering the weak formal powers the Narodnyi Khural in Kalmykia is endowed with, has it been allowed to play any independent role at all, and has it been a hostage to or a beneficiary of the political processes in the republic? In the previous chapter I described how the Khural in Buryatia on some occasions has served to check the policies of the executive power. The same cannot be said about the Kalmyk Khural, which by many has been characterised as a pure rubber stamp institution. During the first years of its existence the parliament never voted against any of the president's law initiatives, including the highly controversial Steppe Code (*Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 24 March 1994). Further illustrating the general political atmosphere is the fact that during the debates on amendments to the Steppe Code in 1995, there were serious debates in the Legislative Assembly about extending Iliumzhinov's presidency to lifetime, and some representatives even wanted to make it hereditary (*Vedomosti* 1997: 35).

A subservient parliament can be a logical consequence of the fact that 1/3 of the parliament is elected from a list put together by the president. However, a parliamentary vote needs only a simple majority, implying that it still would be possible for the parliament to "rebel" against the president. A newspaper interview with the Khural deputy German Borlikov in 1995 sheds some light on what motivates the Khural's loyalty. In the interview he complains that the deputies do not get sufficient time for preparation ahead of important votes, that new issues often are added to the agenda during the Khural session and then almost unanimously voted for, and that votes often are preceded by strong pressure from the executive power to vote in a certain direction (*Sovetskaia Kalmykia*, 7 February 1995). In other words, the rubber stamp description does indeed seem quite suitable for the Khural in Kalmykia.

I believe that another explanation can be found in the elaborate patron-client network stretching from the president down to the bottom level of the Kalmyk society. As mentioned, the Steppe Code allows the president even to appoint all heads of state institutions and businesses, including the *sovkhos* and *kolkhoz* directors. Furthermore, one of Iliumzhinov's first actions as president was to dissolve the local soviets and dismiss the local heads of government. Instead of these he appointed his own representatives as *raion* heads (Senatova 1995: 2). These ruled alone in the regions until the law "On local self-government in the Republic of Kalmykia" was adopted in 1996, and remained powerful even after that. The law defined a very weak local self-government. The regional political assemblies were only to have consultative powers, and were elected at so-called *skhody*, that is, village gatherings voting over issues and electing their leaders through open majority vote and without preceding election campaigns. As a result, those who were elected were almost without exception the very same *kolkhoz*, *sovkhos* and business directors who had been appointed by Iliumzhinov. Secret elections of the city council and mayor were allowed to take place only in Elista, but the winner of the mayoral election in 1997 was nevertheless the presidential representative in Elista, Viashcheslav Shamaev (Ryzhkov 1996a: 2; 1997a: 2).

These Iliumzhinov clients at the local level have had considerable influence over election results. According to the 1994 law "On the election of deputies to the Narodnyi Khural" the presidential representatives confirm the composition of the local election commission, and the president himself appoints the republican election commissions (Section IV). The commissions can in practice use the detailed election rules to make highly political decisions as to which candidates shall be allowed to run for election (Kasimov 1994: 3–4; *Sovetskaia Kalmykiia*, 24 October 1995). Furthermore, the presidential representatives could put pressure on the employers to make them agitate in favour of certain candidates among their employees. A quite substantial element of fear was also at play here. Jobs are scarce in Kalmykia, and in order to keep people employed in the state apparatus loyal decrees from time to time order "attestations"⁵¹ of all employees (Ryzhkov 1996a: 2).

As a result of these and other factors, such as the lack of free mass media, only two opposition members were elected in the first parliamentary elections in 1994. One of them, Vladimir Kolesnik, was subsequently simply denied access to the parliamentary sessions by the other Khural members,⁵² and the second, German Borlikov, gradually stopped being critical of the government.

Who were the people representing the new political elite in Kalmykia? In Buryatia the elite actors were a mixture of old nomenklatura members and big industry, gradually also co-opting members of the young business community. In Kalmykia, on the other hand, Iliumzhinov acted quickly on his promise to abolish the Supreme Soviet and cut the bureaucracy, but the fact that the old Supreme Soviet voluntarily signed its letter of resignation after the presidential election surprised many. It has been said that Iliumzhinov used both the carrot and the stick to make this happen. Every member of the Supreme Soviet was invited to a private conversation with Iliumzhinov. Some of them chose to join his team, whereas the large majority were enticed or threatened to leave (*Sovetskaia Kalmykiia*, 23 September 1993).

Some of those who chose to join Iliumzhinov became his most loyal and faithful helpers. These were first and foremost Konstantin Maksimov, who became speaker of the Khural, Valerii Bogdanov, who was appointed vice-president and for a period also acted as prime minister, and David Kugul'tinov, who had known Iliumzhinov since his childhood. He was appointed head of the "Council of the Elders"—a council with consultative powers attached to the presidential administration. These three have surrounded Iliumzhinov ever since he was elected, and only Maksimov has (in 1999) lost his position since then.⁵³

Another group of people in Iliumzhinov's closest entourage is people from his own family. His brother Vyacheslav is his closest advisor, and has been put in charge of Kalmykia's oil interests in Western Siberia.⁵⁴ Then

51 The so-called Attestation Commission makes an evaluation about whether the state employees perform their jobs in a satisfactory way.

52 Interview with Vladimir Kolesnik, leading member of Yabloko in Kalmykia, Elista, May 2001.

53 Interview with presidential advisor Vladimir Volgin, Elista, May 2001.

54 Interview with ethnologist Natalia Zhukovskaia, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow, May 2001.

there are his friends, old classmates, and business colleagues—from Elista and from Moscow. Occasionally quite influential people were appointed to important positions, such as the Moscow mayor Jurii Luzhkov's brother-in-law, Viktor Baturin, who served as Prime Minister for some months in 1999. Most observers seem to agree that Iliumzhinov takes care not to let any of his helpers become too powerful: Once that happens, the person is soon replaced by someone else.⁵⁵ The reorganisations of government have been frequent: By January 1999 the government had been dissolved and reconvened five times, and twice it had even been abolished as an institution (Ryzhkov 1999a: 3).

This elaborate patron–client system embracing the entire power apparatus in Kalmykia indicates that the parliament members had vested interests in the regime. The reason for their loyalty was not only fear of the consequences of losing their positions, but also an interest in keeping the riches within a small group of people. This was reflected in the fact that here, as in Buryatia, the parliament was interested in extending their term from four to five years, and they succeeded in this in July 1998 (Ryzhkov 1998d: 5). At the same time, however, the patron–client system worked to exclude large parts of the population from any power and influence, and thus stimulated an ever more disgruntled “movement of the deprived”. The rest of the chapter will look at the ways in which this “movement” was kept quiet.

The judicial power: Persecuting the law-abiding

As I showed in the case of Buryatia, control over the judicial apparatus is an effective way of preventing alternative power centres from emerging and hindering openness around the ways in which the political system works. Thus, in Kalmykia the election of Iliumzhinov was followed by a fierce struggle for the control of the judicial power in the republic. The republican interior ministry, including the police, soon came under the president's control as Iliumzhinov's brother was appointed deputy minister (Kolosov and Streletskii 1996: 31). More difficult to control were the legal institutions that are formally under federal control. The Steppe Code gave the president a say in the appointment of federal judges and the republican procurator, but first he had to struggle with those who had been appointed before he came to power.

The first battle was over the Supreme Court and the procurator. The leader of the Supreme Court, Aleksandr Belogortsev, proved to be independent minded and concerned with following federal law, and so was the procurator, Vladimir Shipeev. Iliumzhinov's people repeatedly went to Moscow to ask permission to replace Shipeev, but without any success. Apparently, Iliumzhinov lacked the good relations with the Procurator General that Potapov had with Skuratov. According to federal law the federal level shall also have a say in the dismissal of the head of the republican Supreme Court. But as Kalmyk law ignored this stipulation, the president could—with parliament's consent—opt for a simple replacement of Belogortsev. The justification was that Belogortsev had been serving as a judge for more than the two five-year periods republican law permitted him to serve (*Izvestiia*, 2

⁵⁵ Interview with presidential advisor Vladimir Volgin, Elista, May 2001.

September 1994). As for Shi-peeov, when his term ended in 1996, the republican authorities did not agree to appoint him for another term, and a candidate more to Iliumzhinov's liking was elected.⁵⁶

Another federal organ that for some years was a threat to the unhindered redistribution of assets among regime-loyal people was the republican branch of the federal secret police, FSB. The head of FSB in Kalmykia, Vladimir Timofeev, on several occasions gave newspaper interviews that were highly critical of the executive power and its economic affairs (*Sovetskaia Kalmykiia*, 22 August and 16 December 1997). The conflict between FSB and the Kalmyk authorities reached its climax in the summer of 1997, with the so-called "telephone war". The story of an FSB employee who by mistake tapped the wrong telephone and the subsequent conflict between FSB and the telephone company were used for all that they were worth by the authorities, in order to discredit FSB (Makarov 1999: 16). Timofeev eventually gave in and left the republic.

Thus, in Kalmykia the formal powers granted to the president in appointing judges to federal courts turned out to be crucial in the case of removing the head of the Supreme Court and the procurator. Strong political control over mass media and the police was used to crush the resistance of the secret police. Finally, in both the latter case and the case of the procurator, active lobbying on the federal level assisted the removal of "unpopular" heads of legal institutions.

Political parties and organisations: United in disunity

In his 1993 election programme Iliumzhinov had promised to dissolve all political parties and he had only just been elected when he started actively co-opting existing political parties and organisations. He succeeded in winning the support among others from the Agrarian Party, whose candidate won the Duma seat for Kalmykia at the 1995 federal election (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 157).

The parties that refused to support Iliumzhinov faced strong attempts to curb and subvert their activities. The fact that both the legislative and the judicial powers were more or less completely dependent on the executive power inevitably made this easier. The former could be used to provide legal means of curbing organisational freedoms, such as the law "On political parties" from 1994, and the latter to implement the laws. For instance, the law "On political parties" requires that in order to get registered as a political party the party needs to have at least 1% of the republic's population among its members—a number even the Communist Party would find it hard to mobilise. Upon registration the party has to submit complete registers of all its members, including their private addresses. The Ministry of Justice has the right subsequently to question any of the party members. They in practice used this to threaten people for instance with losing their jobs unless they left the party (*Sovetskaia Kalmykiia*, 23 May 1995).

Concerning the use of non-legal methods I can mention the example of the Farmers' Association of Kalmykia that was led by Bambaev, Iliumzhinov's opponent at the 1993 election. As Kalmykia is a predomi-

⁵⁶ Interview with former procurator in Kalmykia, Vladimir Shipeev, Moscow, June 2001.

nantly agrarian republic, this was the most powerful interest organisation in Kalmykia. After the election it soon faced subversion: At an extraordinary convention Bambaev was dismissed, a new leadership appointed, and after that the organisation became a loyal supporter of Iliumzhinov's policies (Senatova and Kasimov 1994: 4). The trade unions faced a similar subversion (*Sovetskaia Kalmykiia*, 18 July 1995).

The Communist Party, on the other hand, refused to give in and remained in opposition. This party has, despite the fact that it possessed the strongest organisational resources after 1993, failed to become the strong focus of the opposition it could have been, considering Iliumzhinov's market capitalism. Internal rivalry and disagreements seems to have been an important reason for this. Furthermore, the Communists have vacillated between a purely oppositional position and occasional support for the president's candidates at the elections. For instance, at the 1995 Duma election they supported Iliumzhinov's candidate, Kulik (Ryzhkov 1999b: 2). He represented the Agrarian Party, which co-operated with the Communists at the federal level during this election.

The strong authoritarian tendencies of the Iliumzhinov administration versus a weak opposition forced the latter after some time to join forces and constitute a broad political front against the government. This development reminds of the development in other authoritarian regimes in Europe over the past 10 years, notably Yugoslavia and Belarus. The pivotal event that mobilised and united the opposition was the decision to abolish the old constitution and adopt the Steppe Code in 1994. The Public Committee for the Defence of the Constitution, Citizenship and Human Rights was established, embracing all political forces from anarchists and Kalmyk and Russian nationalists to liberals (*Izvestiia Kalmykii*, 15 March 1994). In February 1995 this union was transformed into a political party called the People's Party that tried to get its leader, the Duma representative Bembia Khulkhachiev, nominated as a candidate at the presidential election in 1995. This failed, and with the disillusionment following this event and the defeat at the Duma election in 1995 (*Sovetskaia Kalmykiia*, 8 March, 26 September and 27 December 1995), followed by an intensified suppression of the opposition, the party gradually disintegrated. Still, the opposition has remained relatively united, although it failed to agree on nominating a single candidate for the mayoral election in Elista in 1997 (Ryzhkov 1996b: 5–6) and the Duma elections in 1998 (Ryzhkov 1999b: 2).

After 1995 the strongest and most vocal opposition party has been Yabloko, and generally parties that are republican branches of strong federal parties are the only significant parties to have survived throughout the period. It has been crucial for these parties that they, in an atmosphere of constant physical and psychological harassment and unemployment for active opposition members, could draw on support and funding from the federal party.

Since the opportunities to express political protest through elections and mass media are so weak in Kalmykia, protest has to a large extent been expressed through demonstrations on the main square in Elista—normally with up to 200 participants. The protest that received most publicity because of police brutality was when a state-sponsored charity organisation called

“From heart to heart” in the spring of 1998 staged demonstrations and hunger strikes against the social policies and economic and political conditions in the republic. The protest culminated with the chair of the organisation, Lidia Dordzhieva, fleeing the republic and eventually obtaining political asylum in the US (*Sovetskaia Kalmykiiia*, 4 February, 30 April and 18 August 1998).

In the case of Buryatia I showed that the government has left civil society more or less in peace, since it could rely on the support of the most important interest organisations and parties and did not feel threatened by the rest. In Kalmykia the situation was different and therefore the government’s attitude to organisational freedoms was also different. The basis of the regime in civil society was far narrower than it was in Buryatia. The largest interest organisation, the Farmers’ Association, initially opposed Iliumzhinov and the largest political party, the Communist Party, was also in opposition. In order to control the republic it was important for Iliumzhinov to gain control over the former and subvert the latter. The harsh measures that were used to curb civil society created strong polarisation, where the opposition is weak but strongly disgruntled.

Mass media: Curiosity kills...

The political polarisation also became reflected in the mass media situation in Kalmykia: There is no such thing as politically independent mass media in the republic. Already before Iliumzhinov was elected in 1993, the main newspaper, *Izvestiia Kalmykii*, had proved to be clearly on his side. However, in the conflict around the Steppe Code it published some articles critical of the government, and the editor—a long-time friend of Iliumzhinov—Menki Koneev, also turned more critical of the president’s policies. Thus he was sacked, and the president’s press secretary became new editor (*Saratovskoe obozrenie*, 16 April 1994). Since then *Izvestiia Kalmykii* has solely been publishing pro-Iliumzhinov materials.

The only serious opposition newspaper in Kalmykia was and is *Sovetskaia Kalmykiiia segodnia*—perhaps the most famous anti-regime newspaper in all Russian regions. It has survived through eight years of serious harassment. During the 1993 election campaign, *Sovetskaia Kalmykiiia*⁵⁷ actively supported Bambaev, since it was owned by among others the Farmers’ Association and funded through the agrarian bank Bain. The campaign to suppress the Farmers’ Association was also intended to weaken the newspaper, and this was further achieved by declaring Bain bankrupt (Senatova and Kasimov 1994: 4–5). Attempts to dismiss the editor and establish a parallel *Sovetskaia Kalmykiiia* loyal to the president forced the old newspaper collective to move its production to the neighbouring Stavropol *krai* (Simonov 1997). Since then the newspaper has been brought into the republic by car and sold in the streets in Elista. Subscribing to the newspaper or selling it from newspaper stands and shops is prohibited by law.⁵⁸ The same

57 *Sovetskaia Kalmykiiia* was forced to change its name to *Sovetskaia Kalmykiiia segodnia* in 1995.

58 Interview with the editor of *Sovetskaia Kalmykiiia segodnia*, Gennadii Iudin, Elista, May 2001.

is also the case with two smaller anti-government newspapers: *Leninskii put'*, published by the Communist Party in Kalmykia, and *Elistinskie novosti*.

Sovetskaia Kalmykia segodnia gained its fame not least because of its editor, Larisa Iudina. After 1995 the newspaper became associated with Yabloko, and served to propagate the ills of the Iliumzhinov administration, public protests and alternative election candidates. Iudina specialised in digging down into the alleged embezzlement of federal subsidies committed by the government, and soon got interested in ARiS—a company administering the offshore zone (*Pamiati Larisy Iudinoi* 1998). This sealed her fate. In 1998 Kalmykia was to organise the World Chess Olympiad in Elista, and the government's image became more important than ever. Iudina threatened to stain this image, and, consequently, in June 1998 she was found slain in a pond in Elista. The opposition is convinced that someone in Iliumzhinov's circle ordered the killing but the trial in 1999 convicted two young men with a criminal record (*RFE/RL Newslines*, 30 November 1999).

The independent mass media received its energy from the political polarisation in the republic, and their eagerness to attack the government in its turn brought harsher measures to curb them. The fact that Iudina was killed because of her journalism is—if the opposition is right in its suspicions about who committed the murder—an indicator of how far the presidential administration was willing to go.

7.3. 1998 and thereafter

In the case of Buryatia I showed how the new presidential election in 1998 marked the consolidation of the regime. In the case of Kalmykia the second presidential election had taken place already in 1995, and one could argue that the new regime was consolidated already then, since the potential for alternative power centres had been seriously weakened with the introduction of the Steppe Code in 1994. The struggle against parts of the judicial apparatus, however, continued also after this and so did the battle against the last remnants of independent party life and mass media. Consolidation was probably reached with the murder on Iudina in 1998.

At the same time, 1998 was something of a turning point in the political life in Kalmykia. That year so much negative publicity was drawn to Kalmykia that the government from then on faced stronger external pressures. The Iudina case achieved wide publicity both in Russia and abroad. Later the same year the World Chess Olympic Games were organised in Elista, and scandals around the construction of amenities and the illegal appropriation of federal transfers to finance the event drew more negative attention to the Iliumzhinov administration (*Segodnia*, 24 September 1998). Another factor was the fact that with the resignation of the Chernomyrdin administration in Moscow some important allies disappeared from the power centre. The new Minister of Finance, Mikhail Zadornov, started a campaign against the republican authorities, which culminated in an economic boycott of Kalmykia imposed by the Federal Treasury in November 1998. The centre denied the republic any money transfers until it had paid back misappropriated funds. Iliumzhinov responded by threatening to leave the Fede-

ration, but was eventually forced to back down (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 20 November 1998). Finally, power struggles at the federal centre in 1999 also made federal actors interested in winning the State Duma election in Kalmykia. The Duma seat in 1999 was won by the candidate from the new party of power, Edinstvo, Aleksandra Burataeva—a young and beautiful Kalmyk TV presenter on the state channel ORT. Second came the Yabloko candidate, Kolesnik, who had gained more popularity after the murder on Iudina. Iliumzhinov supported neither of these candidates but the candidates who ended up third and fourth in the election (Ryzhkov 1999c).

The first cracks in the regime had actually started occurring with a stronger pressure to overturn republican laws and articles in the Steppe Code that contradicted the Federal Constitution and laws. Real changes took place only from the latter half of 1997, when the republican law “On local self-government” was amended, followed by among others the law “On elections to the Narodnyi Khural” in July 1998 and the law “On the president”. This made practices such as parliament representatives appointed by the president and seven-year presidential terms unlawful. The Steppe Code was also amended in 1998, making judges in Kalmykia appointed by the Russian, not the Kalmyk president, and denying the president the right to declare a state of emergency (Ryzhkov 1998c: 2, 1998d: 5; *Izvestiia*, 15 October 1998).

Despite all this the degree of control and regime consolidation must not be underestimated. Iliumzhinov keeps the control over his entourage by ruling by the “law of divide and rule”, the government is dismissed and reappointed almost every year and all alternative power centres are weak, although vocal.

7.4. Conclusion

The Iliumzhinov administration fits neatly into the “winner-takes-all” mode in Gel’man’s model of regime outcomes. When Iliumzhinov took control over Kalmykia in 1993 the Supreme Soviet was voluntarily dissolved and the industry “renationalised”. Power and wealth were concentrated in the hands of a small group of people—few of whom had belonged to the old nomenklatura—while the group of potential alternative power centres was gradually diminished. A fact that distinguishes Kalmykia from most other regions in Russia, including Buryatia, is the amazing degree of patron–client control Iliumzhinov has been able to assert. The incentives and fears that are built into this system are combined with active propaganda aiming at justifying the fact that people live in poverty and lack political and civil rights—in other words what Weber would have called a charismatic leadership style.

The formal legal framework allowed Iliumzhinov to establish such sultanistic powers. It is, however, necessary to turn the causal relationship on its head in this case: The legal framework does in itself mirror the special political situation in the republic. In Chapter 5 I described the fractionalisation of the political elite in Kalmykia, and how two of the strongest parties had refused to participate in the 1993 election. After the election the opposition was too divided and weak to pose a real counterforce against Iliumzhinov’s power usurpation, thus supporting my assumption about the role of non-government institutions as buffers against a strong executive power. At the

same time, though, the fact that the administration was based on only a small part of the interest groups and civil society urged the president to use hard countermeasures to crush the opposition. Thus, it would seem that, although the non-governmental structures in Kalmykia were weaker than in Buryatia the perceived threat from them provoked the emergence of the “khanate”.

8. “Bridging the ethnic gap” or “divide and rule”?

Above I have examined the applicability of transition and consolidation theory to the regime developments in Buryatia and Kalmykia. Now it is time to investigate whether the fact that my analytical units are ethnically defined federal subjects adds something to this explanation. More specifically, I will look at the role of intra- and inter-ethnic competition and polarisation in the regime developments in Buryatia and Kalmykia.

8.1. Buryatia: A president for all the peoples?

Role of ethnicity in society

As I mentioned in the introduction, Buryatia has a complex ethnic structure by being a society with three levels of ethnic cleavages. The first level is the cleavage between the Russian majority and the Buryat minority, the second between the ethnic subgroups of East and West Buryats and the third between different clans and *zemliachestva*⁵⁹ among the Buryats. I will now try to assess the level of competition and polarisation among these groups in society in general, before turning to the impact of ethnicity on political regime development, in particular.

According to Horowitz, the level of ethnic polarisation in society depends on the level of competition among ethnic groups for the same jobs. In Buryatia a tendency may be observed over the last few years of employing people belonging to one's own ethnic group. Boris Bazarov suggests that this is a natural mechanism in times of uncertainty, such as those the Buryat society has been going through in the 1990s: You need to trust the people you employ, and you put more trust in people from your own ethnic group.⁶⁰ But, as pointed out by Horowitz, such practices will only have a negative impact on the inter-ethnic relations in the republic if the ethnic groups are unranked, i.e. they have similar structures of employment. This is not the case with the Buryats and the Russians. For instance, the Buryats are overrepresented in the agricultural sector, whereas the Russians are particularly overrepresented among industrial workers. Buryats also dominate higher education and research in the republic: 74% of the people

⁵⁹ A *zemliachestvo* is an organisation taking care of the cultural and social needs of migrants from a Buryat populated region when they move to the city. At the same time this becomes an important place to tie bonds with people from your home region that later can be useful for instance in order to get a job, and the *zemliachestvas* also support certain politicians and are active lobbyists. Interviews with Igor' Pron'kinov, former leader of the Buryat-Mongol People's Party and Irina Elaeva, sociologist at the Buryat Research Centre. Both interviews were conducted in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

⁶⁰ Interview with Boris Bazarov, Director of the Buryat Research Centre and member of the Committee in the Narodnyi Khural on International and Regional Contacts, National Questions and the Activities of Public Organisations and Religious Associations, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

employed in higher education and secondary vocational education are Buryats, and in the Buryat branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences they make up 65 to 85% in all but one institute (Abaeva and Tsyrenov 1999: 45). The Russians, however, dominate the technical intelligentsia. Thus, in these sectors of the economy the Buryats and Russians do not compete much for employment, and this fact reduces the potential for inter-ethnic tension.

More worrisome is the fact that the Buryats also predominate in business. Data from 1994 show that they were better represented among owners and directors of all kinds of private businesses than they were in the population as a whole (Randalov 1996: 16). The Russians are leaving Buryatia in far greater numbers than the Buryats, whereas the Buryats actually arrive in the republic in larger number than those leaving. This is due to migration from the two other Buryat populated federal entities, the Aga-Buryat and the Ust-Orda Buryat Autonomous *Okrugs*. Many have also arrived from former Soviet republics (Abaeva and Tsyrenov 1999: 19). Some argue that one explanation for the Russians leaving Buryatia is the disadvantages Russians face when they want to start their own business.⁶¹ The main reason, however, may be that Buryatia is a region of economic depression. The Buryats choose to stay behind out of the expectation that it will be harder for them as Asians to get employed in other regions, and because of a strong attachment to the home soil and the Buryat family. Even so, preferential employment opportunities for Buryats in Buryatia are an important motive for Buryats arriving in the republic, an issue I will return to when looking at the impact of ethnicity on politics.

Not only is there a tendency to employ people from your own ethnic group; for the same reason it has also become more common to give family bonds and “*zemliacheskie*” connections a high priority when employing people. This takes place at the expense of merit and seems to be more common among the Buryats than among the local Russians (Humphrey 1998: 144–145). These phenomena are invisible to the outsider, and receive little publicity. This particularly concerns the cleavage between East and West Buryats, but I believe it to be far more important than the lack of public attention should indicate. Writing about this topic seems to be a taboo in the republic. As a matter of fact, the very first scholar I approached with a question about the East–West cleavage laughed and said: “No one is ever going to talk to you about that issue”. Therefore I can only rely on anecdotal evidence in this case that, however, was agreed to by so many of my respondents that I find it plausible.

The division between East and West Buryats goes far back in history. The traditionally shamanist West Buryats living west of Lake Baikal came first in touch with Russians and were subject to assimilation to a higher extent than the semi-nomad East Buryats. The latter were more in contact with missionaries from Tibet and Mongolia and thus became predominantly Buddhist, although this is Buddhism mixed with shamanism. In the Communist period Russified West Buryats from Irkutsk *oblast'* were sent to

61 Interview with ethnologist Nataliia Zhukovskaia, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, May 2001.

Ulan-Ude to occupy central positions in the power hierarchy. This fact was much resented by the East Buryats.⁶²

The division remains today and I find it useful to apply Horowitz’s categories of backward and advanced groups to these relations and consider the East Buryats as the backward ethnic group struggling for equality and recognition, whereas the West Buryats are the advanced group clinging to its privileges. On the colloquial level it is quite easy to recognise a certain discontent among the West Buryats, who now are in the process of losing their former positions in the republic. Many West Buryats are disgruntled by the fact that East Buryats tend to display a certain attitude of superiority, claiming to possess a higher degree of ethnic purity since they have preserved the Buryat language, names, the Buddhist religion, and cultural traditions. These identity markers have to a larger extent disappeared in the west. The East–West cleavage and also the *zemliachestvo* identity are reflected in the intellectual nation-building debate in Buryatia. Among other things there is a strong debate around the ethnogenesis of the Buryat people, concerning where the earliest signs of Buryat settlements were discovered: west or east of Lake Baikal and in what region within these areas (Bulag 1994: 461–462; Nimaev 1988)?

Consequently, there is only limited reason to expect strong inter-ethnic polarisation in Buryatia when looking at the ethnic division of labour in the republic. To Horowitz, though, the most dangerous competition for jobs is the scramble for administrative positions. The strengthened East–West cleavage among the Buryats appears to result from such a changing balance in the distribution of administrative positions, and seems to have increased the intra-ethnic polarisation among the Buryats. This will be elaborated on when I now turn to looking at ethnicity in politics.

Role of ethnicity in politics

The highest and lowest levels of ethnic cleavages both had an impact on the first presidential election in Buryatia. First of all, there were two Russian candidates; Leonid Potapov and Valerii Shapovalov, and two Buryats; Aleksandr Ivanov and Sergei Namsaraev. The Russian–Buryat dividing line is, however, not quite as clear-cut in this case. Potapov is a Russian who spent eight years of his childhood in a Buryat village in Northern Buryatia, where he learnt to speak Buryat. Ivanov, on the other hand, is what the Buryats call a *metis*—half-Russian, half-Buryat. In one of the newspaper articles promoting Ivanov’s candidacy, a lady said she would support Ivanov because he as a *metis* would be able to soften potential inter-ethnic conflict (*Buriatiia*, 28 May 1994). Not everyone felt that way: *Metises* have a tendency to end up between two chairs and never be fully accepted by either national group. In the case of Ivanov there were accusations during the election campaign that he tried to hide the fact that he was a Buryat (*Buriatiia*, 25 June 1994). It is nevertheless justified to consider Ivanov more as a Buryat candidate since it was well known to everyone that behind

62 Interviews with various Buryat politicians and scholars in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

Ivanov's back Saganov was the one pulling the strings. Saganov was a Buryat, and, actually, Ivanov was the nephew of Saganov's wife.⁶³

As only 24% of the population of the republic were Buryats it is impossible for a Buryat to be elected if the other candidate is a Russian and the voting strictly follows ethnic dividing lines. In Buryatia people did not allow ethnicity alone to determine their vote, although it had been clear already at the federal elections in 1993 that Buryats showed a greater tendency to vote for the Party of Russian Unity and Concord and that Russians were more numerous among those who voted for the Liberal Democratic Party (Abaeva and Krianev 1994: 8). Among the supporters for Potapov there were also many Buryats. As mentioned, Potapov was quite acceptable to the Buryats because he had grown up in a Buryat village and showed knowledge of and tolerance towards their national culture. Besides, Potapov's closest ally in the election campaign was Lidia Nimaeva,⁶⁴ an East Buryat who was known to promote Buryat interests.

Saganov, on the other hand, came from the isolated Tunkinsk region in Western Buryatia. His power base rested much upon people from this region and, as mentioned, even people from his own family. The ethnic issue was exploited by Potapov during the election campaign: Saganov had enraged the Russian part of the population by demanding that the president of the republic be Buryat and that the Buryats be overrepresented in political organs. Many Buryats had also been incensed by his preferential policy towards his own clan (Kislov 1998a: 6). As a result, his opportunities for building an alliance with important groups were more restricted compared to Potapov, who would be acceptable both to the Russians and to a large part of the Buryats. It is interesting to note that the only four regions where Ivanov received a majority were the three westernmost regions (Saganov's power base) and the northernmost region, the Muiskii *raion* (*Buriatiia*, 5 July 1994).⁶⁵

Consequently, one of the factors assisting Potapov's victory in 1994 was the fact that he on ethnic issues was a compromiser acceptable across ethnic divides. The inter-ethnic polarisation was at the outset neither so strong as to result in people voting strictly along ethnic lines, nor did it prevent alliances across the ethnic dividing lines. During Potapov's period as president he apparently has allowed an increasing number of East Buryats into administrative and political positions. At the same time, my respondents among politicians in the Khural mostly agreed that Potapov uses divide-and-rule tactics among the Buryats in parliament in order to gain support from either of the groups for various political initiatives, although they were unable to mention concrete examples of this. If this is true, it would seem that Potapov takes advantage of the internal division among the Buryats in order to strengthen his own position, but as a result the intra-ethnic East–West divide among the Buryat increases.

63 Interview with sociologist Galina Manzanova, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, February 2001.

64 Interview with Sergei Panarin, professor in sociology, Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, May 2001.

65 This region has throughout the 1990s distinguished itself from other northern regions by having a strongly anti-Potapov electorate. See Kislov 1998c: 8.

Buryatia therefore seems to be a case of a republic where non-titulars possess the most important political positions although the titular nation is overrepresented on the whole. This bodes for a certain balance between the Russians and the Buryats but not completely free from tensions. A 1997 survey also reflected this fact: 25.7% of the respondents characterised the inter-ethnic relations as "good", 47.5% as "satisfactory", and 16.5% preferred characterising them as "unsatisfactory".⁶⁶

Gorenburg (1999) has pointed out that the titular group in cases like Buryatia tends to compensate for its lack of real power by launching a strong public campaign of ethnic revival. This seems very much to be the case in Buryatia, where the Buryat intellectuals are obsessed with issues concerning Buryat history and culture. The inter-ethnic competition in Buryatia has not been translated into support for the nationalist parties established mainly by these intellectuals. The Buryat-Mongol People's Party and Negedel received much attention around 1991–94, but even then these parties were marginal, and they have later been further marginalised. Among Russian nationalist parties LDPR in 1993 and 1995 performed poorer than the average for the Russian Federation in the State Duma elections (McFaul and Petrov 1998: 107). Kuras and Bazarov (1999: 26) point to the fact that since party life in the republic is weak, organisations in civil society have become politicised instead. However, also the nationalist demands of these organisations have a low support among the population in the republic (Krianev 1999: 32–33).

The only major incident in the 1990s where inter-ethnic tension erupted on the surface of society was the episode with the Atlas of Tibetan Medicine on the eve of the second presidential election in 1998. In the spring of that year there were plans to send an atlas of Tibetan medicine abroad to a temporary exhibition in the United States. The Buddhist clergy, fearing they would never get the Atlas back, started picketing outside the government building to prevent the Atlas from being sent off, and were soon joined by a number of other Buryats, including Saganov. The local police responded by beating up the crowd with batons, and this received broad publicity all over Russia (Pak 1998: 36). Potapov's strongest contender in the 1998 election, Aleksander Korenev, quickly took advantage of the situation and accused Potapov of having ordered the attack on the peaceful crowd. Potapov nevertheless managed to turn this conflict to his advantage by exploiting Russian fears of Buryat nationalism.⁶⁷

The incident with the Atlas showed how politicians could take advantage of hidden inter-ethnic disgruntlement in order to win the support of their own ethnic group at elections. Potapov could win the support of the Russians by showing a tough stance against Buryat "nationalism". At the same time his image among the Buryats as a compromiser, being on good terms with all ethnic groups, was strong enough to rescue his political career.

66 The data was provided by Seseg Budaeva and has been compiled by the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Buryat Research Centre), Institute of Mongolian, Buddhological and Tibetan Studies, Department of Sociology and Political Science, Ulan-Ude.

67 Interview with political scientist Boris Krianev, Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, January 2001. Some even believe the demonstrations were organised by Korenev, in co-operation with Saganov and Buddhist leaders, as a part of the election campaign. Interview with sociologist Seseg Budaeva, Buryat Research Centre, Ulan-Ude, January 2001.

From the outset inter-ethnic polarisation has not been strong in Buryatia, and it does not seem much stronger after eight years with Potapov as president. Potapov's ability to build inter-ethnic alliances has strengthened him further in the consolidation of his regime and the Potapov administration seems to employ a policy of balancing between the various groups. It neither wants to give too many concessions on language and employment policies to the Buryats nor to alienate them by abolishing their disproportionate representation. At the same time, the Atlas story shows that the ruling elite occasionally also takes advantage of inter-ethnic cleavages to strengthen its position, and the same goes for the internal divisions among the Buryats. The West Buryats are disgruntled over having lost some of their former political standing in the elite, but as the West Buryats are in minority among the Buryats this does not threaten the ruling elite.

8.2. Kalmykia: “He is a Scoundrel, but *our* Scoundrel”.

Role of Ethnicity in Society

Like in Buryatia, ethnic relations in Kalmykia are multi-layered. First, there are the inter-ethnic relations between not only the Russians and the Kalmyks, but also a third group of various Caucasian peoples—mainly Dargins and Chechens—that make up approximately 10.1% of the population (Guzenkova 1992: 2). Second, the Kalmyks are internally divided in three major ethnical subgroups called *uluses* that have a role similar to the Buryat *zemliachestva*. In Kalmykia the Western Buzavs were the group traditionally most in touch with the Russians and in this respect they correspond to the West Buryats. Many Buzavs were baptised and joined the Cossacks. The largest group is the Diervuds, who live in the central and northern parts of Kalmykia. Finally, Kalmyks living in Eastern Kalmykia along Volga are called Torguts. Traditionally their region was somewhat richer than the north and west (Guchinova and Tavanets 1994: 12).

Throughout the Soviet period there does not seem to have been a political preference in Moscow for one subgroup at the expense of other groups as was the case in Buryatia. On the contrary, there seems to have been an attempt to balance the three groups in the political administration.⁶⁸ Another important difference between the Buryats and the Kalmyks is the numerical difference: While the Buryats constitute a minority in Buryatia, the Kalmyks are the largest ethnic group in Kalmykia, comprising 45.4% of the population in 1989—compared to 37.7% for the Russians (Guchinova 1997: 16).

When examining the level of inter-ethnic polarisation in Kalmykia, the immediate impression is that the polarisation is somewhat stronger here than in Buryatia. This impression is confirmed by Gorenburg's analysis of indicators of cultural and civic nationalism among the titular population of 16 Russian republics, based on survey data from 1993. On all six indicators⁶⁹ Kalmykia scores higher than Buryatia. The Buryat respondents

⁶⁸ Interview with Ivan Ryzhkov, leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia, Elista, May 2001.

⁶⁹ The indicators are: “Should titular language be the sole official language in the ethnic republics?”, “Should all inhabitants of an ethnic republic be required to know the titular

rank as number seven or eight among the republics on all indicators, whereas the Kalmyks rank from two to six. The latter score particularly high on the indicators of ethnic nationalism. For instance, 83% (compared to 71% in Buryatia) considered that the titular language should be compulsory in all schools in ethnic republics. 66% even agreed to make the titular language the sole official language in ethnic republics, compared to 35% of the Buryat respondents (Gorenburg 2001: 80–86).

The picture of inter-ethnic relations in Kalmykia is still mixed. Already in 1992 Guzenkova described Kalmyk–Russian relations as “segregated but friendly”. On the one hand she pointed to a very low rate of mixed marriages between Russians and Kalmyks: 5.6% in the cities and only 2.4% in the countryside. On the other hand, a low rate (10%) of urban Russians stated that they would prefer to work only with other Russians, and 12.5% of urban Kalmyks stated they would rather work only with other Kalmyks (Guzenkova 1992: 14–15). Like in Buryatia, the ranked structure of the ethnic division of labour among Russians and Kalmyks prevents the competition for jobs from turning into a major issue of conflict. The educational level is lower among the Russians and they tend to work in industry and are overrepresented among the technical intelligentsia, whereas Kalmyks are overrepresented in agriculture, arts and culture, and as teachers and doctors (*ibid.*: 9–11).

This ranked social stratification among Russians and Kalmyks can be contrasted with the relations between these two groups—particularly the Kalmyks—and North Caucasians. Kalmyks are dissatisfied with the fact that particularly Dargins and Chechens, who on invitation from the republican authorities started migrating to Kalmykia in the 1950s, have intruded into the traditionally Kalmyk occupation of cattle farming—mainly as highly efficient herders. Approximately 50% of the people employed in cattle farming in Kalmykia in 1992 were North Caucasians and nationalist politicians exploited fears that they would start buying up farmland. Tensions ran high particularly in the period leading up to the presidential election in 1993 (Ochirova 2000: 53–54). Armed confrontations between Kalmyks or Russians and Caucasians in some rural districts have become almost a yearly phenomenon in Kalmykia (Guzenkova 1992: 20–21; *Rossiiskii regional'nyi biulleten'*, 2 June 2001).

There is an additional concern about the increasing influx of Caucasians, in particular Chechens, to Kalmykia over the last few years. 45% of the respondents in a 2000 survey were negatively inclined towards Caucasian migration to Kalmykia (Katushov *et al.* 2000: 163). This factor has probably contributed to the fact that growing numbers of people in Kalmykia would prefer to live in ethnically homogeneous surroundings. While 10–12.5% of the respondents in 1992 preferred an ethnically homogeneous workplace, in a 2000 survey 33.4% of the respondents believed their lives would have

language?”, “Should study of the titular language be compulsory in all schools?”, “How do you feel about the declarations of sovereignty by the former autonomous republics?”, “Should all republics have the right of self-determination, including withdrawal from the Russian Federation?” and “Should control of the army, police and security be transferred to the jurisdiction of the sovereign republics?”

improved if they had been living in an ethnically homogeneous community (*ibid.*: 160).

The relationship to the Caucasians does not, however, have repercussions on the regime development in Kalmykia, which is the case with Russian–Kalmyk relations. Here, like in Buryatia, the rate of ethnic Russians leaving the republic has consistently been higher than the titular rate. This can to a large extent be explained by the fact that Kalmykia is one of the poorest regions in Russia but an important reason is probably also the political situation in the republic.⁷⁰ Since research in Kalmykia is subject to political censorship, this cannot be confirmed by any surveys. Nevertheless, in the further analysis I will try to estimate how ethnic polarisation in Kalmykia has influenced the regime development, and vice versa.

Role of Ethnicity in Politics

At the first partly democratic elections to the republican Supreme Soviet in 1990 more than 100 of the 130 deputies elected were Kalmyks,⁷¹ and consequently the Kalmyks more or less monopolised political life in the early 1990s. At the 1991 presidential election there were no Russian candidates. Instead the election was dominated by the leading Kalmyk nomenklatura members.

In the 1920s the “Declaration of the Rights of the Working Kalmyk People” had aimed at a “unification of all scattered parts of the Kalmyk people in one administrative–economic unit”. During the Soviet period, however, *ulusizm* was rather allowed to gain a gradually increasing importance as a factor in nomenklatura appointments and distribution of scarce commodities (Sengleev 1990). Consequently, in the 1991 election the *ulus* factor was frequently exploited by the candidates. They could count on support from the members of their own *ulus*⁷² at the same time as they would use accusations of *ulusizm* to discredit their contenders. The importance of *ulusizm* became obvious when the election results showed that the Torgut Batyr Mikhailov received the votes from the eastern districts and the Diervud Vladimir Basanov from the central and western regions (Guchinova and Tavanets 1994: 8). As described in Chapter 5, though, the results of these elections were annulled and new elections postponed.

When the next attempt to get a president elected was made in 1993 the contenders for presidency were again all Kalmyks but once more representing different *uluses*: Iliumzhinov represents the Western Buzavs, whereas Ochirov is a Torgut. According to the former Popular Front leader, Boris Andzhaev, the Buzavs and the Diervuds (the latter make up 60% of all Kalmyks) formed a tactical alliance in the period leading up to the election. This allowed Iliumzhinov to win all but two election districts, both in Torgut-dominated districts in the west (Andzhaev 2001).

A propensity among the Buzavs to vote for Diervuds rather than for Torguts had been noted already at the 1991 election (Guchinova and

70 Interview with Gennadii Iudin, editor of the opposition newspaper *Sovetskaia Kalmykia segodnia*, Elista, May 2001.

71 Personal communication with Ivan Ryzhkov, leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia, April 2002.

72 Kalmyks jokingly describe these relations as “*khot’ i merzavets, no svoi merzavets*”—He may be a scoundrel, but he is our scoundrel.

Tavanets 1994: 8). This factor does not provide a sufficient explanation as to why Iliumzhinov won over Ochirov (e.g. why the former chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mikhailov—a Torgut—would support the Buzav Iliumzhinov), but is nevertheless important to bear in mind. For instance, the sub-ethnic factor partly explains which civil society movements supported Iliumzhinov and Ochirov. Since the former is a Buzav with Cossack ancestors it was quite natural for the Union of Cossacks to support him, whereas the “Dolbano–Privolzhskoe zemliachestvo”, defending the rights of Torguts, supported Ochirov.

The political situation in Kalmykia since 1993 has been characterised by a small group of actors using incentives, threats and ideology to hold on to its all-dominant political and economic power. Here ethnicity has played a double role: partly in appointments to public positions, and partly through a use of ideology to justify the dominance of a narrow elite. The nationalist movements that had blossomed up to 1993 vanished together with the rest of civil society, apart from a handful of political parties and organisations. It was quite telling of the support the nationalist parties and organisations had in the population that a 1993 survey discovered that approximately 2/3 of the respondents did not know of the activities of the Kalmyk and Russian nationalist movements (Guchinova and Tavanets 1995: 41). Thus, here, like in Buryatia, the nationalist sentiments of the population were to a limited extent translated into support for nationalist parties.

Whereas one has to be good at reading between the lines in Buryatia in order to gain any information on sub-ethnic divisions, *ulusizm* is a recurrent topic in the public debate in Kalmykia. Among the top leaders, Iliumzhinov has tried to keep a balance between the different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. For instance, he took care to emphasise that among the nine Khural members he was entitled to nominate, there were five Kalmyks representing the various clans, and the other four represented the Russians, Dargins, Kazakhs and Koreans⁷³ (*ibid.*: 43). Still, even regime supporters will admit that a certain “Buzavisation” of the power apparatus has taken place since Iliumzhinov gained power (Guchinova and Tavanets 1994: 12). Most attention has been drawn to the evidences of nepotism mentioned in Chapter 7. Furthermore, some regime critics claim that the result of the Buzav–Diervud alliance in the 1993 election was that Diervuds, such as the prominent nomenklatura member and poet David Kugul’tinov, were allowed to retain their positions in the power apparatus (Andzhaev 2001).

When the opposition People’s Party was established in 1994, one of its proclaimed aims was to “overcome the traditions of *ulusizm* and *rodovizm*”.⁷⁴ But, it took them some time to find someone belonging to Iliumzhinov’s Buzav clan to join in among the most active members of the party. Among the dissatisfied Kalmyks there are particularly many Torguts, who have lost most of their former political power, and these gathered in the

73 The Chechens, that are the fourth largest ethnic group in Kalmykia, were for some reason not represented, whereas the small Korean minority did have their deputy in the Khural, which shows that ensuring the representation of the largest ethnic groups was not the sole aim.

74 The difference between the two is that *rodovizm* is based on direct kinship, whereas *ulusizm* is based both on kinship and regional identity.

People's Party in such numbers that it by some was nicknamed the "Torgut Party" (Senatova 1995: 4).

The "Buzavisation" of the political administration has not only alienated many Torguts but also the Slavic population in Kalmykia. This exclusion of Russians from public administration is far worse than in Buryatia: For example, in the Narodnyi Khural elected in 1994, 19 were Kalmyks, and only 5 Russians (Maksimov 1996). In 1996 only 4 of 27 members of the presidential administration were Russians and 4 of the 20 members of government. The Kalmyks also have an almost complete control over the highest positions in the Kalmyk economy, for instance, 17 of 19 bank directors were Kalmyk (Guchinova 1997: 27–28). The few Russians in Iliumzhinov's entourage tend either to be married to Kalmyks or to be old classmates and business partners of Iliumzhinov.⁷⁵ Consequently, in Kalmykia, compared to Buryatia, far larger sections of the population are kept outside the orbit of power. In Buryatia the regime represents an alliance between the dominating ethnic group, the Russians, and the larger part of the Buryats. In Kalmykia the largest ethnic group, the Kalmyks, are in power, but has mainly representatives only from one *ulus* out of three, and the Russians are excluded.

Furthermore, since the Kalmyks both are the largest ethnic group and they are in power, the public debate in Kalmykia has a different character from the one in Buryatia. The issue of ethnic revival is important among Kalmyk intellectuals, as well, but does not play such an all-important role as it does in Buryatia. Official ideology rather emphasises the president's role as a moderator of inter-ethnic dissonance in the troubled North Caucasian region, and as a true cosmopolitan contributing to peace also in other places through his extensive network. This role is even enshrined in the Steppe Code, where Article 11 states that "the Republic of Kalmykia shares the responsibility for existing global and universal problems, and undertakes to make an effort to solve them in a spirit of love, compassion, charity and progress, thereby contributing to peace on Earth". As a symbol of this, huge portraits of Iliumzhinov together with religious leaders like the Russian Patriarch, Dalai Lama and even the Pope line the streets of the capital Elista, and his biography contains pictures of Iliumzhinov in friendly conversation with Saddam Hussein and Daniel Arap Moi (Iliumzhinov 1995).

In the Kalmyk Steppe Code a separate article guarantees the preservation and development of Kalmyk culture (Article 16) and the Kalmyk language is also singled out as in special need of protection (Article 18). On the whole, however, republican law defines only weak prerogatives to the Kalmyks, but the strong *de facto* position of the Kalmyks has still led the political opposition to focus on the evidence of anti-Russian discrimination, rather than on the need of a Kalmyk cultural renaissance.

On some occasions the Iliumzhinov administration has turned to the use of pro-Kalmyk rhetoric in order to discredit the opposition and the federal centre and to justify and legitimise Iliumzhinov's rule. The regime's base in the largest ethnic group allows it to use such arguments. Sometimes this rhetoric even pops up in Moscow newspapers. For instance, the article "The

75 Interview with Gennadii Iudin, editor of *Sovetskaia Kalmykiia segodnia*, Elista, May 2001.

War of the Uluses”, published in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* in 1999, claimed that it was only the Torguts who supported the Germans during World War II—thereby provoking the Kalmyk deportation in 1943—and contrasts them with the loyal and Russified Buzavs.⁷⁶ The article links the Torguts to the opposition in Kalmykia and emphasises the danger connected to the aim some of them have to reunite with Kalmykia the territories lost to Astrakhan Oblast’ in 1943. The only person able to prevent the republic from falling apart due to intra-ethnic tensions and conflict with the neighbouring oblast’ is allegedly the unifying and strong power of President Iliumzhinov—“the cosmopolite, who aims at unifying all the Kalmyks” (Serenko 1999).

This use of an “us–them” ideology by the government has been quite frequent since Iliumzhinov came to power, and indirectly contrasts the Kalmyks and the Russians. This ideology exploits and nurtures Kalmyk memories of the deportation of the Kalmyk people in the 1943 and their sense of being exploited and ignored by the federal centre. An example is a letter printed by the Kalmyk language newspaper *Khal’mg Unn* in June 1997 as a response to a letter signed by 13 opposition parties and organisations. The newspaper letter drew comparisons between the opposition today and the “traitors” in World War II that informed Stalin about disloyal elements among the Kalmyk population. Then the result was the deportation of the Kalmyk people; today, something similar to the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh or Chechnya may be the result of such activities, the author claims (Piureeva 1997).

One of the first instances in the 1990s in which the aversion against the federal centre was displayed was when the presidential candidate Ochirov on the eve of the election in 1993 invited two of his influential supporters at the federal centre to Elista to participate in his election campaign. These were the president of the International Russian Club, Mikhail Bocharov, and the editor of the journal *Buddhism in St Petersburg*, Dondokov. At a meeting that was broadcast on republican TV, Bocharov accused Iliumzhinov of a series of economic crimes. Many Kalmyks strongly disliked the fact that people from Moscow came to tell them how to run their own affairs, and at the end of the meeting 40–50 angry Iliumzhinov supporters had gathered outside the building (Kasimov 1993: 9). This episode is indicative not only of a traditional centre–periphery complex; the national factor also to a certain extent plays a role here. This is reflected in acute sensitivity against all attempts at degrading the position of the Kalmyks. The episode surely did not strengthen Ochirov’s chances of winning the election.

On later occasions the “us–them” complex has been used by the republican authorities in conflicts with the federal centre. One example of this was the aggressive protests following an article in the Moscow newspaper *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* 13 November 1997 with the ironical title “Kirsan-khan, or why all people in Kalmykia are happy”. People set newspapers on fire in the central square in Elista, and some participants drew parallels between the article and “Goebbels’s propaganda” (Ryzhkov 1997b:

76 The Kalmyks were deported to Siberia in 1943 and their territory incorporated into the neighbouring regions. They were allowed to return in 1956 and the autonomous republic was re-established in 1958. The Kalmyk opposition has accused the author of the article of being paid by the Iliumzhinov administration to write such an article (Kolesnik *et al.* 1999).

2–3). The word “genocide” is also frequently used as an accusation against the centre whenever a conflict arises, even when the question is about something as far removed from genocide as the closure of the National Bank of Kalmykia for lack of financial discipline in 1998. The vice-president and the speaker of the Narodnyi Khural made an appearance on republican TV, where they drew direct parallels between the closure of the bank now and when the bank was closed ahead of the Kalmyk deportation in 1943 (Ryzhkov 1998f: 1).

Finally, an ethnic element is also blended into Iliumzhinov’s elaborate attempts to build a personality cult. For instance, the main research institute in Kalmykia was for many years preoccupied with proving that Iliumzhinov descended from Chinghiz Khan. The fact that he, like Chinghiz Khan, was born in the year of the Tiger is also thought to have a positive influence on his leadership qualities. The personality cult otherwise draws upon the heritage from the Soviet leaders and includes elements such as compulsory portraits of Iliumzhinov in public places (one headmaster lost her job for neglecting this), a public holiday to celebrate the president’s birthday, and a state ideology called “ethnoplanetary thinking”—allegedly heavily influenced by Moonism (*The Economist*, 20 December 1997; ORT 2001).

Gorenburg predicts that the numerically dominant position of the Kalmyks will enable this public display of pro-Kalmyk rhetoric. He does, however, not explain why this dominant position and the strong ethnic nationalism among the Kalmyks is combined with a Steppe Code that, like the Buryat Constitution, promotes mainly a civic national identity. One reason for this may be the fact that one of the purposes behind the Steppe Code was to prove Kalmykia’s loyalty to the federal centre after Iliumzhinov’s unpopular attempt to mediate between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet in the 1993 conflict in Moscow.

Consequently, the politically dominant status of the Kalmyks is a result of informal politics rather than of positive legal discrimination. I have shown how the rhetoric has a Janus face: When directed against the surrounding world it emphasises the peaceful and harmonious state of inter-ethnic relations in Kalmykia. On the other hand, attacks against the opposition and the federal centre that exploit the Kalmyk deportation trauma have mainly occurred in the republican mass media.

9. The relevance of transition and consolidation theory for my cases—a comparison

My analysis started with a criticism of some scholars of Russian regionalism for shying away from building theories about regime change in ethnically defined federal subjects. I asked whether it would be possible to apply the existing theories on regime transition and consolidation also in these cases, or whether a full understanding only can be obtained through a scrutiny of the factor that distinguishes them from other, territorially defined entities: ethnicity.

In my choice of case studies I aimed at finding two cases that had developed relatively different regime types, but that in many other respects were similar. Therefore I went for the two Mongol republics Buryatia and Kalmykia, the first of which I initially labelled as a “guided democracy”, the second a “sultanistic” regime. Despite the fact that the two republics have quite similar scores on a number of socio-economic indicators, a quite similar relationship with the federal centre and closely related titular populations, these regimes have evolved in different directions. My task has been to explain why.

My analysis has shown that regime transitions and consolidations are complex processes influenced by multiple factors. I started out with five assumptions about which factors influenced the regime transitions and consolidations in my republics but could not find that any of them had to be rejected as irrelevant, although most of them had to be modified.

I) Political-economic structures of governance

According to my assumption about the relationship between political-economic structures and regime change, the compromises and alliance building that characterise Buryatia’s regime will emerge in regions where the economy is concentrated in heavy industry and other industrial sectors that used to be a federal responsibility in the Soviet period. Kalmykia’s “winner-takes-it-all” regime, on the other hand, would emerge from structures where the economy is concentrated in agriculture and light industry.

In the case of Buryatia’s transition, the political-economic structures seemed to be so mixed between heavy industry, light industry and agriculture that a fierce competition between these interests and a weak political power would be a more likely outcome than the “elite association” regime that has emerged. I argued that the results of the collapse of the Soviet economy probably had much to say for co-operation to evolve. As a result of the crisis, the once quite strong Soviet enterprises became heavily dependent on financial support from the republican political administration, and this facili-

tated their co-operation in the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. The Union entered a strategic partnership with the political elite, not on terms of equality, like in the mutually beneficial partnership foreseen by Stoner-Weiss, but rather as a partnership where the political actors are the stronger part. This example shows that in addition to looking at the structural composition of the economy *per se* it is necessary also to evaluate factors such as what capacity the largest enterprises have to survive in the transition economy: How dependent they are on government subsidies and credits.

In Kalmykia, on the other hand, the economic structure did indeed seem to facilitate the emergence of a strong executive power, as the economy is largely dependent on agriculture and the industrial sector is weak. The agricultural sector did not, however, act according to the expectations when Iliumzhinov was elected. It would have been natural to expect that the leader of the strongest interest organisation in the region, the Farmers' Association, who also was part of the ruling elite, would have the best chances of winning the election. Instead the candidate that allied with the weak industrial sector won.

II) Elite struggles in the regime transition

The example with the Kalmyk Farmers' Association suggests that economic-political structures are not all important in determining the outcome of regime transitions, but that also elite calculations need to be taken into account. In my analysis I showed that when the elite groups in Kalmykia made calculations about whom to support they were based among other things on their personal opinions of Bambaev as a politician and his chances of winning the election. The groups supporting Iliumzhinov correctly interpreted the mood of the electorate in Kalmykia at the time and realised that it was tired of corrupt and inefficient nomenklatura leaders. When the "boy from next door" returned to the republic as a seemingly rich and successful businessman, this seemed like the incarnation of the dream many people had of a better life, and they believed his promises to bring welfare and glory to the republic. The strongest counter-candidate, Ochirov, made a less successful analysis of the people's preferences by relying too much on his image as a general and on his connections in Moscow. Thus, this example shows that elite strategies and resources do not alone determine the transition outcome: In order to get elected the presidential candidates also need to present the electorate with an attractive election programme and campaign strategy.

As both Iliumzhinov and Ochirov depended strongly on support among the local elite in the election campaign, it would be wrong to perceive them as real counter-elite candidates. Hence, the transition can hardly have been a "revolution". Still, it deserves being labelled as a forced transition, because of the strongly polarised elite struggle. If the ruling elite had been more unified behind Bambaev or a different nomenklatura candidate, this could easily have prevented any counter-elite candidate from being elected, because the latter would have lacked administrative resources and would not have had equal access to mass media.

This was what happened in Buryatia. The counter-elite candidate here was Shapovalov, whose image quite resembled Iliumzhinov's image as a

populist politician with shady business connections. The crucial difference between the two was that Shapovalov was a real counter-elite candidate. Where the other main candidates participated directly in shaping the new formal institutions in Buryatia to their own advantage, Shapovalov had no influence over these processes. The fact that he was a counter-elite candidate also implied that he had less access to mass media and he could not divert federal transfers or benefit from a strong administrative position to receive economic support from important interest groups. Because of this, Shapovalov did not stand a chance in the election.

In the choice between Potapov and Ivanov/Saganov, however, image and campaign strategy were again important, although the latter was not as important in Buryatia as in Kalmykia. The time factor in Buryatia worked to the advantage of the politicians who wanted to turn back the clock and return to the social safety of the Soviet period. In 1994, one year after the presidential election in Kalmykia, the Buryat population was already tired of politicians promising a rapid economic transformation. Furthermore, the programmes of the candidates influenced what interest groups they were supported by, such as when the Communist Party went for Potapov and the more liberal parties supported Ivanov, but informal networks were also important. The latter, for instance, partly explained why the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs would go for the socialist Potapov instead of the more market-oriented economist Ivanov. On the whole, Potapov was elected after entering an alliance with the most important parts of the civil society, such as the socialist movements, but these alliances were mainly on Potapov's premises. It is therefore fair to speak of conservative reform as the mode of transition in Buryatia, rather than a pact.

According to my initial assumption, such a pact would normally emerge when the regime reformers and moderates in the opposition enter an alliance. In Buryatia, the winning coalition was between the regime hardliners and the opposition moderates, which reduces the chances that the hardliners will be enticed to start democratic reform, especially when the coalition enjoys the backing of the majority of the population. In Kalmykia, on the other hand, it was the regime moderates that entered an alliance with the opposition radicals, which is possible if the moderates are left with promises that they will preserve some of their privileges. Quite logically, such an alliance would stand a better chance of resulting in a democratic outcome than the hardliner–moderate alliance in Buryatia, but the opposite was the result in my cases. One reason for this is the problem of fitting reality neatly into models: The political actors in the Russian context may couple radical market-liberal ideas with authoritarianism, as in the case of Iliumzhinov. Ideologically, then, it was the market liberalism of Iliumzhinov that made the regime moderates support him, whereas politically Iliumzhinov was closer to the hardliners.

III) Formal political institutions

Was it so that the formal institutions, more specifically the republican constitutions and laws, *per se* contributed extensively to the diverging regime consolidations in Kalmykia and Buryatia? My analyses of these legal frame-

works showed that the Kalmyk laws and the Steppe Code defined a considerably stronger executive power than in Buryatia. In particular the executive in Kalmykia had much stronger powers when it comes to appointing and dismissing state employees, including federal judges. Thus, there are grounds to claim that the nature of the regimes has a solid basis in the legal frameworks in Buryatia and Kalmykia.

As formal institutions do not emerge out of nowhere, the fact that they provide the presidents with so different prerogatives begs an explanation. My assumption was that whether the constitution was adopted before or after the first presidential election makes for a crucial difference in the formal powers of the executive. The results of the analysis showed that this claim can be justified. In Buryatia the constitution emerged out of a strong power struggle between the two major factions in the elite where the outcome was uncertain. Therefore the actors did not dare to risk putting too much power into the hands of the executive, in case they would lose the presidential election. In Kalmykia, on the other hand, the Steppe Code was adopted one year after Iliumzhinov had been elected president and at a point when he already enjoyed a very dominant position in the republic, including over legislation. Thus, he could more or less decide how much power should be granted to him in the Steppe Code.

IV) Political processes in the regime consolidation

The formal institutions in their turn to various degrees put constraints on and open up opportunities for the political actors in the regime consolidation. My initial assumption was that formal institutions work together with informal political practices in this process, but that a force that may potentially counteract the consolidation of a strong executive power is non-governmental structures, such as civil society and mass media, and formally independent state structures, such as the legislature, the judicial power and the municipalities.

In my analysis of the formal institutions I pointed out that it is almost paradoxical that Iliumzhinov did not ensure the executive even stronger constitutional powers, when considering his degree of control over Kalmyk society when the Steppe Code was adopted. I argued, however, that perhaps exactly his level of control provides us with the explanation for this. Right after his election Iliumzhinov had dissolved the Supreme Soviet and “nationalised” the republican economy. Furthermore, local self-government organs had been replaced with presidential representatives. As I mentioned, the major difference between the Kalmyk and Buryat constitutions is the president’s powers to appoint and dismiss state employees and federal judges. When this is added to the strong control the president already had over society, the president did not really need to add any extra formal powers in order to achieve full control over society. The powers to appoint and dismiss people are particularly important in a society where patron–client relationships and personal loyalties play an essential role.

In comparison, the role of informal networks seems somewhat less predominant and the formal institutions more important in Buryatia. Among other things, the legislature and the judicial power to a certain extent act

independently, and so did the mayor of Ulan-Ude in 1995–97. The “elite association” regime here has allowed Potapov to consolidate his regime more through compromise than by use of force. Force has nevertheless been used to shut down or streamline a large part of the mass media in the republic, and it was also used to remove the troublesome mayor of Ulan-Ude, Shapovalov. The measures used against the free news media in Buryatia have, however, not reached the level of brutality and conformism of Kalmykia. Furthermore, civil society has been left in peace.

The reason for this, I argued, seems to be the fact that the regime in Buryatia rests on an alliance with many of the most significant civil society movements and the largest political party, the Communist Party. In Kalmykia, on the other hand, the Communist Party has most of the time been one of the most ardent opponents of the Iliumzhinov regime. So were initially also the most important interest groups: the Farmers’ Association and Trade Unions and their associated newspapers. Although civil society from the outset was weaker and more fragmented than in Buryatia, this threat from parts of civil society has made it more imperative for Iliumzhinov to quell their resistance by restricting the organisational freedoms.

The size of the ruling elites seems to determine the approach to these alternative power centres. In Buryatia, the regime rests on a quite broad alliance between political and economic actors—gradually also co-opting the emerging business elite. This is radically different from the narrow and confrontational elite in Kalmykia, based on a small group of Iliumzhinov’s family, business partners, school friends and a few loyal nomenklatura members. This narrow basis and confrontational nature breed polarisation with the groups that are excluded from the regime. Polarisation in its turn creates a need of stronger measures against alternative power centres and a regime ideology justifying these measures. Iliumzhinov has actively been trying to create such an ideology and build up a personality cult around his presidency, and this does seem to be something that many people in the republic buy into.

Indeed, personality seems to be another factor influencing the nature of the regime that is consolidated, and not only in this obvious case with Iliumzhinov’s rather eccentric personality cult. To explain the fact that so strong measures were employed against the weak and fragmented civil society in Kalmykia and not against the more vibrant civil society in Buryatia, the fact that larger parts of the Kalmyk civil society opposed Iliumzhinov does not seem like a sufficient explanation. Perhaps was it just as important that Iliumzhinov was more “paranoid” about political opposition than Potapov, or felt a stronger need for a total control over society? Such assumptions about the psyche of political leaders easily turn into speculations. Thus, I will limit myself to suggesting that the president’s *perception* of the strength of and threat from the opposition may be more important than reality in determining his relationship to alternative power centres.

V) Intra- and inter-ethnic polarisation

This fifth and final variable is the one that I think has the potential to make the regime transition and consolidation in the republics in the Russian Fede-

ration different from the transition and consolidation in territorially defined federal subjects.

I believe that my analysis of inter- and intra-ethnic competition and polarisation in Kalmykia and Buryatia has shown that these factors do not function as independent variables influencing the regime developments in Kalmykia and Buryatia. Rather they work to strengthen already existent tendencies produced by the variables mentioned above, more particularly the elite struggles and political processes, i.e. the dynamic variables in my theory.

My initial assumption was that numerical weight and different levels of polarisation between and within ethnic groups would influence which alliances are concluded in the transition period and that the ethnic balance in these alliances again influences the level of polarisation in the consolidation period. The latter will have an impact on what kind of regime is consolidated. Russian–titular segregation and inter-ethnic polarisation do seem to have been somewhat stronger in Kalmykia than in Buryatia. This fact and the even more important factor of Kalmyk numerical plurality in the republic contributed to the fact that all the candidates at the presidential elections in 1991 and 1993 were Kalmyks. Furthermore, the infighting among the *uluses* that became particularly tough from 1990 also created quite strong intra-ethnic polarisation, reflected in a tendency to vote for representatives from one’s own *ulus*.

The strategy subsequently chosen by Iliumzhinov to strengthen his power base in Kalmykia has in many ways been the opposite of Potapov’s strategy in Buryatia: to keep the power within a small group that is much based on Iliumzhinov’s own Buzav clan. In Buryatia, on the other hand, the only group that seems to be excluded from administrative positions today, compared to the Soviet days, is the sub-ethnic group of West Buryats. The fact that the divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is based on such permanent lines as intra- and inter-ethnic divisions has further increased the polarisation in society, and then particularly in Kalmykia. Here the strong power base of the regime, combined with the polarisation, has enabled the regime also to use “us–them” arguments to legitimise their rule—arguments that in more open societies could have put the regime in jeopardy.

9.1. Lessons to be learned

Although the regime in Kalmykia in particular has many features that make it unique, I believe that there are lessons to be learnt from my case study of two Mongol republics that can also be generalised to the study of other republics in the Russian Federation. Inter-ethnic competition is an issue in all of these republics and many of them also have similar sub-ethnic cleavages.⁷⁷

The main conclusion to be drawn from my analysis seems to be that on the whole the same factors influence the regime transition and consolidation in ethnically defined federal subjects as in territorially defined subjects. First, already existing political-economic structures influence which resources actors possess and what kinds of alliances they will conclude. One needs

⁷⁷ See, for instance, a recent study by Matsuzato (2002) of inter- and intra-ethnic cleavages in the republics of Bashkortostan, Mordovia, Udmurtia and Mari-El.

to bear in mind, though, that the economic crisis that followed in the wake of the regime transition in Russia acts as an intervening variable between the Soviet era political-economic structures and elite struggles. The crisis can make weakened economic actors more ready to co-operate with the political actors than they would otherwise have been, and more ready to accept co-operation on unequal terms, facilitating elite association.

Second, elite struggles can change the direction of the regime transition by being based on calculations about whom to ally with that are not only based on what resources and positions the other actors possess. When the transition is culminating in elections these calculations will also take into account the potential various candidates have of getting elected; i.e. how well their programmes and strategies fit with the preferences of the electorate. Indeed, the genetic perspective of transition theory is often so focused on elite preferences that it overlooks the role of the electorate.

Third, formal political institutions provide the fundament for the new political regime, but they themselves are only a reflection of the context they were adopted in. A crucial factor here is the level of competition and uncertainty in the elite struggle surrounding the emergence of these institutions.

Fourth, formal institutions restrain and provide opportunities to the political actors, but the political process during the regime consolidation is shaped through a blend between the framework provided by these formal institutions and informal practices. This determines the nature of the relationship between the executive power and formally independent state and non-governmental structures. The extent to which these structures manage to assert their independence further influences the degree of transparency in public life. The perceived threat from the independent actors actually seems more important than their actual strength in provoking the executive power to employ harsh power measures. Thus, the personality of the president probably also has a role to play in determining the nature of the regime.

Fifth, to the extent ethnicity does play a role in regime transition and consolidation in Russian republics, it seems that its role is mainly instrumental: a useful tool for elite actors in order to achieve the goal of gaining and consolidating their power. If the ethnic cleavages in society are exploited, this has the potential to create other political alliances and thereby also different outcomes than if other cleavages get to dominate. At the same time, the use of ethnicity for this purpose will have repercussions on the level of ethnic polarisation, bringing the polarisation in society to much higher levels than what otherwise would have been the case. The examples of Kalmykia and Buryatia are quite telling in this respect, as they both to different extents exclude parts of the population from representation in the power apparatus.

One of the few things the election programmes of the apparatchik Potapov and the businessman Iliumzhinov had in common when they got elected was their promises to promote peaceful inter- and intra-ethnic relations. Nearly ten years later it seems that Potapov has been somewhat more successful than his colleague in Kalmykia in fulfilling this promise. Where a conscious strategy is adopted of balanced co-optation and consensus across the ethnic dividing lines, the role of ethnicity will be diminished. Where on the other hand a strategy of exclusive, ethnically based sultanism is applied, the fact that the dividing lines are ethnic may prove particularly dangerous

for the stability of the regime. These examples suggest that ethnicity indeed should be included in the explanation of regime developments in Russia's republics, and not only for the sake of understanding a regime's sources and paths of development, but also its potential for survival.

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Izvestiia Kalmykii (Elista)

Molodezh Kalmykii (Elista)

Sovetskaia Kalmykia segodnia (Elista)

The Economist (London)

Izvestiia (Moscow)

Komsomol'skaia Pravda (Moscow)

Nezavisimaia gazeta (Moscow)

Novaia Ezhednevnaia Gazeta (Moscow)

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Pravda (Moscow)

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslite

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For newspaper articles on Kalmykia stemming from the Moscow press and Saratov I am largely indebted to Iulii Oglaev's compilation of press cuttings in *Kirsanovshchina: Sbornik publikatsii SMI* (2000). Stavropol: GP "Stavropol'skaia kraevaia tipografiia".

Qualitative interviews

Andzhaev, Boris, former leader of the Kalmyk People's Front. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.

Badmaev, Valerii, deputy chairman of Yabloko in Kalmykia. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.

- Baiartuev, Bato**, deputy president of the Congress of the Buryat People. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Bazarov, Boris**, director of the Buryat Research Centre and member of the Committee in the Narodnyi Khural on International and Regional Contacts, National Questions and the Activities of Public Organisations and Religious Associations. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Borlikov, German**, deputy of the Narodnyi Khural since 1994 and director of the Kalmyk State University. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.
- Borosgoev, Damba**, chairman of the Presidential Council of the Nationalities of the Republic of Buryatia and former member of Supreme Soviet. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, February 2001.
- Budaeva, Seseg**, sociologist at the Buryat Research Centre. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
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- Elaeva, Irina**, sociologist at the Buryat Research Centre. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Fedorov, Iurii**, lecturer in law at the Buryat State University. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
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- Khamutaev, Vladimir**, leading member of a number of Buryat nationalist movements and parties, e.g. the People's Front, the Buryat-Mongol People's Party, Negedel. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Khulkhachiev, Bembia**, representing Kalmykia in the State Duma 1993–95 and leader of the People's Party in 1995. Interviewed in Moscow, June 2001.
- Kolesnik, Vladimir**, leading member of Yabloko in Kalmykia and before that the People's Party, participating in all elections since 1994. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.

- Krianev, Boris**, professor in political science at the Buryat State University. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Maksimov, Konstantin**, speaker of the Narodnyi Khural 1993–99, former member of Supreme Soviet, historian at the Kalmyk branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.
- Manzanova, Galina**, sociologist at the Buryat Research Centre. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Mikhailov, Taras**, historian at the Buryat Research Centre. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Oglaev, Iulii**, leading member of the Communist Party in Kalmykia, former leader of the Public Committee for the Defence of the Constitution, Citizenship and Human Rights and co-founder of the Dolbano-Privolzhskoe zemliachestvo. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.
- Ovshinov, Aleksei**, dean of the Department of Philosophy, Kalmyk State University. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.
- Panarin, Sergei**, professor in sociology and Buryatia expert at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. Interviewed in Moscow, May 2001.
- Pron'kinov, Igor'**, former leader of the Buryat-Mongol People's Party. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Ryzhkov, Ivan**, leader of Yabloko in Kalmykia and former leading member of the Slavs of Kalmykia. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.
- Sanzhiev, Garmazhap**, historian at the Buryat Research Centre and active member of the communist movement in Buryatia around 1993. Interviewed in Ulan-Ude, January 2001.
- Shipeev, Vladimir**, former procurator in Kalmykia. Interviewed in Moscow, June 2001.
- Timoshenko, Boris**, monitoring network supervisor at the Glasnost Defence Foundation. Interviewed in Moscow, May 2001.
- Volgin, Vladimir**, advisor to President Iliumzhinov. Interviewed in Elista, May 2001.
- Zhukovskaia, Natal'ia**, ethnologist specialising on the Buryats and the Kalmyks, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences. Interviewed in Moscow, May 2001.

I also conducted interviews with five members of the Narodnyi Khural in Ulan-Ude and two Kalmyk researchers who preferred to be anonymous. Furthermore, several of the respondents listed above stressed that they did not want to be directly quoted in the text. Others are also not quoted in the text, but provided me with useful background information and discussions.

From Apparatchik to President – From Businessman to Khan

Regime Transition and Consolidation in the Russian Republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia

During the 1990s the Russian federal system moved ever closer to a confederation. The 89 federal subjects developed political regimes ranging from democratic systems to strongly authoritarian one-man rule. Through case studies of the republics of Kalmykia and Buryatia, Jorunn Brandvoll here investigates which factors determine why some federal subjects turn democratic, while others turn authoritarian. The starting-point for the analysis is the assumption scholars seem to make that traditional transition and consolidation theory is ill-suited when applied on ethnically divided societies. Brandvoll shows that traditional transition and consolidation theory does provide a useful framework for explaining the political development in the ethnically defined republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia. However, the ethnic factor makes the political processes in ethnically defined regions somewhat different from those in other federal subjects. Ethnicity here works as an instrument to be used by political actors to gain and strengthen their power. Ethnic polarisation increases the chances that a narrowly defined, ethnically based regime will emerge, like it has in Kalmykia. Furthermore, the fact that the division between the haves and the have-nots follows ethnic dividing lines increases the polarisation in society to higher levels, which in its turn encourages the regime to adopt even harsher measures against its opponents. This can be contrasted with the situation in Buryatia, where the regime draws upon members of the largest ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. By co-opting various elite groups into the regime, Buryatia has developed a stable consensus regime, whereas the confrontational and narrowly based regime in Kalmykia rests on force and fear.