Russia's divided democrats: Splits and barriers to coalition-building (2011-2019)

University of Limerick

Doctoral thesis

Russia's Divided Democrats:
Splits and Barriers to Coalition-Building (2011-2019)

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A thesis submitted for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics

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Submitted: August 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their help with my PhD research project:

My supervisor Professor Neil Robinson for providing guidance and feedback throughout my PhD journey, for his help with my funding applications and the overall support.
Professor Owen Worth and Professor Edwin Bacon for agreeing to assess my work.
Dr. Rory Costello and Dr. Scott Fitzsimmons for providing valuable feedback during my progression panels.
Dr. Niamh Lenahan, Dr. Niamh NicGhabhann and Dr. Gerard Downes for offering training sessions and webinars on various topics that I found really beneficial for my research progression and professional development.
The Politics and Public Administration Department at the University of Limerick for the funding and support.
The Irish Research Council for funding my research project.

My family members who were extremely supportive throughout my PhD journey.
Michael Casey for his extraordinary daily support, his patience of a saint and enormous help with proofreading.
Caroline Casey for additional help with proofreading and her valuable comments.
Kévin Saudé for agreeing to peer review part of my work and providing extremely useful advice.
Dr. Milena Cosentino and Miriam Phillips for their advice and support during our writing group sessions and other meetings.
Miriam Ryan, Dr. Sinéad Walsh and Agata Lynch for their moral support and encouragement.

A special thank you to members of the Russian opposition movement who agreed to participate in my research as interviewees, their contribution was invaluable.
Please note: after consultations with the examiners and the supervisor, it was decided to fully anonymise all interviewees in the interest of their safety, including those who gave permission to name them.
Finally, I would like to thank all other members of the Russian opposition who, despite the difficulties and mistakes described in this work, created vibrant and flourishing political life in the 2010s.

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Abstract

This thesis analyses fragmentation within the Russian democratic movement during the period between 2011 and 2019 in order to identify the primary causes of this phenomenon. Despite their mutual opposition to the Putin's regime, independent opposition parties in Russia struggled to unite in a coalition. The literature on the topic of opposition fragmentation in undemocratic countries primarily focuses on external factors related to institutional barriers (such as strong presidency) or political environment (such as the divide-and-rule strategy of political elites), whereas internal factors remain understudied. There is a category of studies that explore the reasons behind the divisions between liberal-democratic parties during the earlier period of Russian history – during the Yel'tsin and early Putin presidencies; these studies outline both external and internal causes of opposition fragmentation. However, changes in the Russian regime and the emergence of a new generation of political forces justify an up-to-date examination of this phenomenon.

My main findings are based on the case study and qualitative interview analysis. The thesis studies two cases of party splits and two unsuccessful attempts to form a broad opposition coalition. In order to gain a deeper understanding of reasons for these divisions, 19 interviews were conducted with Moscow-based opposition activists and local leaders from different opposition parties and movements. Interviewees were asked about their attitudes towards cooperation with other opposition forces and their opinions regarding the divisions that occurred during the last decade.

This study outlines a range of internal factors that contributed to the opposition fragmentation in Russia: they are related to the ineffectiveness within opposition parties and coalitions that led to the defection of members and the unwillingness of more effective opposition groups to cooperate with the less effective ones, a distrust between opposition groups who expressed different levels of opposition to the regime, weak democratic mechanisms within parties and coalitions that resulted in splits and the unequal balance of power between registered and unregistered parties that complicated coalition negotiations.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the causes of division within the Russian democratic movement and identifies the main barriers to consolidation of opposition parties during the period between 2011 and 2019. This period was selected in order to analyse divisions between contemporary political forces, most of which emerged during or after the protest wave in 2011-2012 around the Duma elections of 2011 and the presidential elections of 2012 that saw Vladimir Putin return to the presidency. The thesis focuses on the non-systemic part of the Russian opposition. The non-systemic part of the Russian opposition includes a range of extra-parliamentary political forces that seek to challenge Putin's regime and achieve a democratic transition. The term "non-systemic" is generally used to distinguish independent opposition forces from the "loyal" (or "systemic") opposition, who agree to cooperate with the ruling group in exchange for permission to participate in the formal political process without the threat of political repressions (Sakwa 2014). Some scholars present the distinction between systemic and non-systemic oppositions as a continuum in which political forces are placed in accordance with the degree of their opposition to the regime and means of political struggle: the loyal and disloyal opposition forces are located at the opposite extremes with the semi-loyal opposition in the middle (White 2011; Gel'man 2005). These categories are not permanent, some of the Russian political parties moved along the continuum as the regime changed. For example, the party SPS (Union of Right Forces) started as a semi-loyal opposition party in the late 1990s, later moving to the disloyal camp as the regime became less democratic in the 2000s. The Communist Party (CPRF) completed the reverse transition, changing its status from an opponent of Boris Yel'tsin's government to a loyal (systemic) force during Putin presidencies (White 2011, p. 658).

Despite continuing debates regarding the number of opposition parties in Russia that are fully independent from the Kremlin, the category of non-systemic forces has become more clearly defined as the Putin regime has transitioned towards greater authoritarianism. During the second round of Putin presidencies, political forces that did not compromise with the regime were gradually excluded from systemic politics through a variety of means such as increased legal barriers to electoral participation applied selectively against independent opposition parties, or the denial of access to state-controlled media to opposition politicians. This exclusion presented opportunities for the formation of a negative consensus coalition against the President and the ruling party,

United Russia. Such a coalition emerged in late 2011-early 2012 when diverse opposition forces (including some representatives of systemic parties) were united in protest against widespread electoral fraud during the 2011 parliamentary election and collectively organised mass protest actions. However, attempts to formalise this broad union in order to structure collective opposition activities were unsuccessful. This includes the establishment of the Russian Opposition Coordination Council, which was supposed to represent diverse opposition groups and coordinate their protest actions. Although many opposition leaders participated in its establishment, both parliamentary and non-systemic parties (Parnas, Yabloko) refused to join this project. Moreover, the Coordination Council experienced internal divisions and started to disintegrate shortly after its foundation. The political party Parnas, which started as an alliance of four opposition forces in 2010-2011, also failed to become a platform for the unification of the democratic movement, as had been initially intended. The party went through several splits and lost a significant part of its membership base. Later opposition alliances also proved to be short-lived. For example, in 2015 several opposition parties formed an electoral coalition in an attempt to reduce intra-opposition competition and improve their chances of electing representatives during regional and parliamentary elections. However, this coalition fell apart during the parliamentary campaign in 2016. In addition, the inability of opposition parties Parnas and Yabloko to form a joint party list during the same election led to the emergence of two competing party lists on the ballot, which split the opposition vote.

During the period analysed in this thesis a relatively large number of independent opposition forces were competing for the same pool of activists in order to maintain their political activity. The most significant of them include three registered political parties (Parnas, Yabloko, Civic Initiative), four unregistered parties (Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation, DemVybor, 5th of December Party, Libertarian Party), political organisation Open Russia and the movement Solidarity. The need for inter-party cooperation within the non-systemic opposition is explained by a combination of factors, such as the parties' mutual goal of defeating Putin's regime, high representation thresholds during elections at various levels, insufficient resources of most individual parties to hold a nationwide election campaign and the inability of some parties to obtain a party license, despite fulfilling the legal requirements to qualify for party registration. Opposition parties could benefit from various forms of cooperation, including the creation of joint party lists in order to minimise intra-opposition competition, endorsement of a single presidential candidate or dividing up majoritarian districts between the parties.

The primary goal of this research is to identify the main factors that prevented Russian opposition forces from successful cooperation within a coalition and to explain why, despite the significant benefits of consolidation, minor opposition parties preferred to maintain their independent status. This work focuses primarily on the internal causes of division. The literature on the topic of coalition-building in undemocratic regimes, which is summarised in the following section, provides extensive explanations of external factors influencing opposition fragmentation, whereas internal factors require a more substantial analysis.

This thesis concentrates on the liberal-democratic wing of the Russian opposition. Far-left and nationalist movements are mentioned, but they are not the primary focus of analysis. These movements played an important role during the wave of mass protests in 2011-2012; in succeeding years, however, they were de facto dissolved due to the imprisonment of their key leaders and internal disagreements on the issue of Crimea. For example, the far-left movement Left Front was significantly weakened by the imprisonment of its popular leader Sergei Udaltsov after the Bolotnaya Square protests. The nationalist leaders Daniil Konstantinov and Konstantin Krylov, similarly, faced criminal charges, which curtailed the activities of the nationalist movement. Moreover, both movements experienced splits in 2014 due to the differences in members' opinions on the status of Crimea and the war in the Donbas region of Ukraine – some of them supported Putin's actions, whereas others protested against the annexation and the provision of military support to Russian-led separatist groups in the Eastern Ukraine.

The following section (1.2) examines the importance of cooperation and coalition-building among opposition parties in undemocratic regimes. A united opposition front is more likely to defeat their authoritarian opponents, considering the unequal level of resources at their disposal and the wide "menu of manipulation" available to the incumbents (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). For example, the history of democratic revolutions in the post-communist space points towards opposition unity as an important factor contributing to opposition's success. In other parts of the world formation of electoral coalitions also tended to contribute to liberalising electoral outcomes (Howard and Roessler 2006). Formation of joint structures capable of well-organised collective action by the opposition is often essential to win over the public opinion and demonstrate the illegitimacy of the current regime.

The subsequent section focuses on external factors influencing coalition-building among opposition parties in undemocratic regimes. They are related to the instability of party systems in such regimes, divide-and-rule strategy of the ruling elite and institutional

features that prevent inter-party cooperation, strong presidential powers in particular. Most of these factors affected cooperation between contemporary Russian opposition parties during the analysed period (2011-2019), which is described in the section 1.3.1. The rest of the chapter explains research methods and the main findings of this thesis – I outline a range of factors that complicated inter-party cooperation within the Russian opposition and led to party splits or the breakdown of opposition coalitions.

This thesis offers an original contribution to the body of literature on the topic of Russian opposition politics by conducting empirical research into the phenomenon of opposition fragmentation and combining two research methods – case study and interview analysis. The work examines and interprets primary interview data gathered for this research, in addition to the in-depth analysis of relevant cases of division that had not been previously studied. Apart from gaining valuable insights into the dynamics of the Russian opposition movement in the 2010s, the thesis can also aid in understanding the issue of opposition fragmentation elsewhere, although further research is required in order to establish a generalisable theory.

1.2 The importance of coalition-building

Opposition unity is not the only factor that determines its success in challenging the ruling elite, but it has been described as an essential component of opposition's victory by many authors. The formation of a democratic coalition is frequently mentioned among the preconditions for ensuring the regime change during different waves of democratisation, including the re-democratisation process in post-war Europe and successful anti-communist revolutions in the 1980s (Cotta 1996). The strength of these coalitions lay in their ability to unite political forces with diverse ideological orientations and support bases. Their success was largely determined by the willingness of participants to temporarily set aside divisive political issues in order to focus on their protest against the oppressive regime. Most of these alliances proved to be relatively short-lived and split during the post-transition period: there was little justification for preserving broad unions within the democratised political environment – both ideological and leadership incompatibilities came to the fore when their overarching goal had been achieved (Cotta 1996). However, it was the broadness of these unions that allowed opposition movements to overcome the divide-and-rule tactics of the incumbent political elites and achieve a successful democratic transition.

The value of unity is also demonstrated by the comparison between successful and unsuccessful democratic revolutions, such as the failed attempts to remove authoritarian

leaders from power in Serbia (1996-1997) and Ukraine (2001) and successes in the same countries in 2000 and in 2004 respectively (D'Anieri 2006). In the first Serbian case, anti-regime protests were triggered by municipal elections that were widely regarded as fraudulent: people took to the streets, demanding the revision of electoral results. The wave of mass street protests grew over several months but only brought minor concessions, instead of the desired regime change. Opposition forces, initially united in a coalition Zajedno (Together), experienced divisions due to internal rivalry over future government leadership and Slobodan Milosevic's successful negotiation of deals with some opposition leaders who abandoned the protest movement in exchange for partial revision of local electoral results. Their betrayal demoralised the remaining protesters and street rallies eventually died down (D'Anieri 2006, p. 340).

This contrasts to the successful Serbian revolution in 2000. In 2000 opposition forces united within an 18-party coalition Democratic Opposition of Serbia and jointly endorsed a single presidential candidate, Vojislav Kostunica (de Krnjevic-Miskovic 2001; D'Anieri 2006). In addition, they coordinated their efforts to organise election monitoring, which allowed the opposition to demonstrate the vote-counting fraud and legitimised their statements regarding Kostunica's victory in the first round of elections. This time mass street protests, in combination with strikes and other protest actions, resulted in the defection of Milosevic's allies and the downfall of his regime. There are some possible alternative explanations of the opposition's success, related, for example, to the difference between local elections in the first case and presidential elections in the second, with the latter protests focused on Slobodan Milosevic personally (D'Anieri 2006, p. 342). However, the formation of a broad opposition coalition and its resistance to governmental manipulation, having learned from the past failures, was crucial to opposition's victory.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the comparison between the two Ukrainian revolutions. These shared many features (including their anti-regime agenda, mass protest actions at Maidan Square in Kyiv and the involvement of student organisations) except opposition unity (D'Anieri 2006, p. 342). In 2001 opposition forces initiated street protests against President Leonid Kuchma's regime, which was becoming increasingly authoritarian. The popular Ukrainian leader Viktor Yushchenko refused to join the opposition and even publicly discouraged protests (D'Anieri 2006, p. 343), which contributed to the gradual decline of demonstrations. By contrast, in 2004 opposition leaders joined forces and supported Viktor Yushchenko as their presidential candidate and the main competitor to Viktor Yanukovych, who had been endorsed by Kuchma as

his successor. Election observers reported widespread electoral fraud during the second round of this presidential election, which triggered a new wave of protests (Åslund and McFaul 2006). This time the demonstrations gathered a much wider support and led to some high-ranking officials switching sides and backing the protesters, whose demands were eventually fulfilled – the second round of the election was repeated, bringing the opposition candidate to power (D'Anieri 2006). As the two pairs of cases demonstrate, the formation of a united opposition front is more likely to encourage the defection of political elite members to the opposition and the refusal of state security forces to disperse peaceful demonstrators.

The ability of opposition forces to unite within electoral coalitions is particularly beneficial in competitive authoritarian regimes, which have contested but unfair elections due to governmental manipulation of the electoral process and results (Howard and Roessler 2006; Levitsky and Way 2002). A cross-national study of 50 elections in such regimes, conducted by Marc Morjé Howard and Philip G. Roessler (2006), identifies opposition coalition formation as the best predictor of post-election regime liberalisation. Their study covers a wide range of cases in Latin American, African, European and Asian regions during the period between 1990 and 2002, and includes various factors that could potentially influence electoral outcomes (including opposition coalition, economic growth, foreign aid and regime openness among others) (Howard and Roessler 2006, p. 375). Opposition forces united in an electoral coalition were significantly more likely to challenge the incumbents and force the regime to liberalise. This did not always imply the establishment of a full democracy in the short-term or even the opposition's election victory in some cases, but it did lead to a general move in the democratic direction, including a transition to a fairer electoral process in the future (Howard and Roessler 2006, p. 369).

Howard and Roessler provide a number of possible explanations for this trend. Unity of political forces and civic groups around the idea of defeating incumbents generally proves to be insufficient. In order to achieve a liberalising outcome through elections, opposition members need a strategic alliance capable of effective political organisation so as to outcompete the ruling political elite, which has more resources at their disposal. In the absence of a well-organised structure, opposition groups are unlikely to ensure voter mobilisation and in addition, become more vulnerable to the divide-and-rule strategy of the regime and other manipulations, as well as political repressions. Moreover, the image of a united opposition can more easily be presented to the electorate as a favourable alternative to the government coalition with a real chance of electoral success.

Advantages of cooperation among opposition forces in a competitive authoritarian regime are illustrated by the comparison between Kenyan elections in 1992 and 1997, won by the incumbent, and the 2002 election, which resulted in the opposition's victory (Howard and Roessler 2006; Gandhi 2008). The opposition's victory in the 2002 election can largely be attributed to the ability of opposition groups to overcome ethnic conflicts and form an electoral alliance, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), which nominated a single opposition candidate.

David White (2011) argues that opposition forces are unlikely to succeed without uniting in a coalition in systems where resources are unevenly distributed in favour of a dominant party. Inter-party cooperation can facilitate the advancement of opposition's goals in authoritarian regimes, where national-level elections tend to be non-competitive due to the ruling party's monopoly on resources and manipulation of the electoral process in its favour, including widespread electoral fraud, exclusion of popular opponents from the race and coercion. Opposition forces in such systems may still decide to engage in electoral activities for the purpose of recruiting new supporters and promoting their political agenda (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009, p. 411). There are various forms of electoral cooperation that can increase the opposition's chance of success, such as the creation of joint party lists or endorsement of a single presidential candidate (Gandhi and Reuter 2008). A united opposition is more likely to challenge the incumbent during elections or organise a powerful anti-regime campaign if excluded from participation. In addition, there is a need to coordinate efforts in order to ensure effective election observation and organise mass protests post-election if widespread electoral fraud has occurred. Moreover, a boycott can delegitimise unfair elections only if this strategy is adopted by the majority of opposition forces (Gandhi 2008).

Despite the significant advantages of coalition-building, opposition parties in undemocratic regimes often fail to join forces, as can be seen, for example, in the aforementioned cases of unsuccessful revolutions. The following section explores the factors that influence coalition-building among opposition forces and the primary reasons behind the opposition fragmentation in undemocratic regimes, relying on a range of theories related to this phenomenon.

1.3 External factors influencing coalition-building

During pre-electoral periods opposition parties in authoritarian regimes are faced with a series of challenging strategic decisions, such as the choice between participation or boycotting the election, the question of entering an electoral coalition as a means to

increase the opposition's chances of victory, selection of reliable coalition partners, protection of votes given for the opposition parties and potential mobilisation strategy in the case of a stolen election (Gandhi 2008, p. 1).

Authoritarian elections differ from the democratic ones in a number of important ways that pose additional barriers to opposition inter-party cooperation and coalition-building (Gandhi and Reuter 2008; 2013). For example, in addition to assessing the potential electoral strength of a coalition, parties have to predict the likelihood of incumbents yielding power in the event of electoral loss, which complicates their cost-benefit analysis. Moreover, undemocratic environments tend to produce unstable party systems with a relatively high number of competing opposition parties (compared to established democracies), some of which may be cooperating with the ruling elite; this discourages anti-regime parties from attempting to form a potentially winning coalition (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, p. 138). Party system volatility implies that the majority of parties have no long-lasting reputations or stable ideological platforms, making it challenging for potential coalition partners to assess their credibility (p. 146). There is generally a degree of mistrust among the opposition parties (p. 146), either due to their previous associations with the regime or the risk of them switching sides in the future, which is reinforced by the fact that different parties often face unequal levels of repression. In addition, parties with no governing experience or distinct ideological basis are more likely to become personality-centric and serve the interests of specific opposition leaders, whose political ambitions constrain the negotiation process.

Electoral manipulation presents another significant challenge for opposition parties. Modern authoritarian regimes rarely rely exclusively on coercion and electoral fraud, but use a combination of methods to disadvantage opposition forces and remain in power (Lust-Okar 2006). While manipulation of the electoral process in favour of the incumbents is not unique to undemocratic regimes (the widespread practice of gerrymandering, for example), authoritarian leaders have a particularly wide "menu of manipulation" unconstrained by the system of checks and balances that exists in democracies: the tools of weakening the opposition include amendments to electoral legislation that advantage the dominant party, monopolisation of resources by the ruling elite, legal barriers to coalition-formation, co-optation of some opposition members with a view to dividing the opposition and repression against others (Schedler 2002; Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Frequent modification of electoral rules contributes to the high degree of uncertainty regarding the electoral process, resulting in the difficulty of planning and engaging in inter-party alliances.

The tactics of dividing the opposition into loyal and disloyal camps, frequently deployed by authoritarian leaders, tends to hinder opposition unification and undermine the efforts of anti-regime groups to achieve a regime change (Lust-Okar 2004). This division is generally achieved by establishing unequal political participation thresholds and costs for different opposition forces: the loyal opposition is allowed to participate in political processes and is therefore, fully integrated into the formal political system, whereas other opposition groups are excluded from it, face institutional and other barriers to political participation, as well as repressions. Included groups are more willing to compromise with the current regime in exchange for various privileges. Contradictory interests of the two camps reduce the incentives for cooperation between them, which prevents their collective mobilisation against the regime.

Jennifer Gandhi and Ora John Reuter's (2013) study, based on analysis of the dataset covering legislative elections in authoritarian regimes between 1946 and 2006, demonstrates that the primary factors determining the likelihood of coalition-formation among opposition parties differ between autocracies and democracies. For example, the literature examining electoral cooperation trends in democracies highlights the importance of electoral rules in creating incentives for opposition parties to enter coalitions or merge. In fully majoritarian electoral systems or mixed systems with a dominant majoritarian component, smaller parties are encouraged to cooperate due to the disproportional allocation of seats, which can lead to wasted opposition votes and under-representation of minor parties (votes-seats disproportionality) (Ferrara and Herron 2005; Bélanger and Godbout 2010). Some scholars conclude that in new democracies that have underdeveloped party systems, proportional representation in combination with an electoral threshold is more likely to reduce the number of competing opposition parties (Moser 1999). However, according to Gandhi and Reuter's findings (2013), in authoritarian regimes opposition parties are not responsive to most legislative incentives and barriers to coalition-building. The authors find that institutional factors, such as the type of electoral system (proportional, majoritarian or mixed), district magnitude and other electoral rules, have no significant impact on the electoral strategies of opposition parties in undemocratic environments. The authors explain this as a result of the factors that distinguish authoritarian elections from the democratic ones such as the high degree of uncertainty regarding behaviours of potential coalition partners and incumbents (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, p. 152).

Similar conclusions could be drawn with regard to party legislation, which can serve as a powerful incentive for inter-party cooperation in democracies, while having little

impact on cooperation trends in authoritarian regimes. For example, Éric Bélanger and Jean-Francois Godbout (2010) argue that amendments to party financing regulations in Canada that banned corporate contributions and restricted individual donations, created financial incentives for some opposition parties to merge. However, in undemocratic regimes, non-institutional constraints to party fundraising, such as the threat of repressions against potential donors, play a more important role than legal restrictions. Therefore, potential financial gains from combining resources of opposition parties are insufficient to justify a merger.

Ideological incompatibilities, similarly, play a crucial role in electoral coalition-building within a democratic environment, whereas in authoritarian systems parties tend to be divided according to their attitudes towards the regime, regardless of their ideological orientations (Gandhi 2008, p. 7; Tucker 2006). For this reason, as Jennifer Gandhi notes, pre-electoral agreements between opposition parties in non-democracies are generally centred around the future governmental positions, rather than promises to implement specific policies. Economic growth or decline also does not have a significant effect on coalition-formation (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, p. 148, 153).

Jennifer Gandhi and Ora John Reuter (2013) identify the presence of a long-lasting major opposition party as a factor that increases the likelihood of coalition-building during legislative elections. The authors explain its impact by the fact that the party's prolonged existence and regular participation in elections allows it to establish a reputation strong enough to be treated as a reliable coalition partner by other opposition forces. Another factor that correlates with coalition-formation is regime coercion against the opposition (coalitions are more likely where electoral repressions are present), although the causal relationship is unclear: the authors mention the possibility of repressions being deployed in response to opposition coordination (Gandhi and Reuter 2013, p. 148, 153). Electoral coalitions here are understood in a broad sense and include a wide variety of inter-party agreements aimed at decreasing intra-opposition competition during legislative elections, such as the formation of joint party lists, joint support for specific candidates or agreements regarding the division of electoral districts between opposition parties.

Authoritarian presidential elections hold additional challenges for coalition-building, particularly in systems with vast presidential powers recognised by the constitution. While conventional wisdom suggests that minor parties should be disadvantaged by the presidential system, and thus encouraged to cooperate (as they have little chance of competing for presidency due to a lack of strong candidates or insufficient resources to

hold a winning presidential campaign), studies demonstrate that strong presidency has the reverse effect in an undemocratic environment (Gandhi 2008). Opposition parties are unwilling to enter coalitions because of the indivisible nature of the presidential post, and more importantly, the anticipated inability to enforce coalition agreements post-election. They can be reluctant to collectively endorse a single opposition candidate in exchange for the promise of governmental positions or implementation of specific policies because vast powers of the future winner, enshrined in the constitution, will allow them to violate pre-electoral agreements without any negative consequences. This effect is reinforced by the aforementioned features of party systems in autocracies – a lack of long-lasting party reputations as a result of unstable ideological platforms and personality-centric party politics, which increases the role of leaders' political ambitions.

The negative impact of presidentialism on party politics can often be observed in young democracies (or countries undergoing democratic transition) with underdeveloped party systems, where presidential ambitions of party leaders tend to complicate coalition-building and reduce the choice of potential coalition partners. This is illustrated by the case of South Korean political parties in the late 1980s-early 1990s: the central role of presidency increased the influence of party leaders and led to "personalistic and paternalistic" party politics (Kim 1997, p. 96). Even those leaders, who campaigned for the democratic transition, were inclined to preserve authoritarian systems within their parties: for example, local activists were fully dependent on the leaders in terms of their nomination as a candidate and campaign finances. Party positions, similarly, were allocated on the basis of connections with the party leaders (patrimonialism) (Choi et al. 2014; Kim 1997). Therefore, relationships between party leaders were crucial to successful inter-party negotiations, whereas the risk of discontent among ordinary party members in response to the leaders' strategic decisions was relatively low. As a result, personality-related factors became decisive in any potential alliance, while ideological differences between parties did not play a significant role. This contrasts with the coalition-building process in established democracies, where ideological proximity of parties and specific policy positions are generally a central point of negotiations.

There are a number of factors that complicate coalition-building in an undemocratic political environment. Parties have to make decisions about alliances in a situation of high uncertainty, arising from unstable electoral rules, a lack of long-lasting reputations of potential coalition partners and the threat of them cooperating with the regime or switching sides in the future. Political ambitions of party leaders also play an important role, particularly in political systems with strong presidential powers and less

institutionalised, leader-centric parties. As a result, inter-personal relationships between party leaders and their attitudes towards the regime tend to become decisive factors in coalition-building, whereas the ideological proximity of parties and institutional incentives for cooperation (such as electoral thresholds) do not play a central role in the decision to engage in an alliance or the selection of a coalition partner. The following section analyses the aforementioned factors within the Russian political context, explaining external barriers to party unification within the opposition.

1.3.1 The Russian context

These general findings are largely consistent with the experience of contemporary opposition parties in Russia. There are some considerable benefits to the formation of a broad anti-regime coalition, which can be seen from successful cases of unifying diverse opposition forces such as the wave of mass protests against electoral fraud in 2011-2012. During these protests opposition groups were able to overcome ideological divisions by focusing on a set of common demands related to regime liberalisation (allowing free and fair elections) and a human rights agenda (freeing political prisoners). However, more usually Russian opposition parties have faced numerous challenges associated with coalition-building in undemocratic environments.

As in the aforementioned case of Korean parties, the central role of the presidency contributes to personalistic party politics and complicates the formation of electoral coalitions. Although the Russian political system is formally defined as semi-presidential (both the parliament and the president have a role in government formation and the government is accountable to the parliament), many scholars categorise it as a super-presidential system (Fish 1997; Huskey 1999; Gel'man 2005; 2006; Beliaev 2006; Hale 2010; Chaisty et al. 2012). The Russian constitution, adopted in 1993, grants many powers to presidents that put them in the superior position relative to parliaments and imposes few checks and balances with respect to presidential decisions. For example, although the State Duma (lower chamber of the Russian Parliament) approves the president's nominee for prime minister, the president is empowered to dissolve the Duma and call new elections in the event of Duma's repeated rejection of the president's nominees. In addition, if the State Duma declares a motion of no confidence against the government twice within three months, the president can decide between the resignation of the government and the dissolution of the Duma. Therefore, the State Duma is strongly discouraged from expressing discontent towards the president's decisions. Presidents in Russia also enjoy vast legislative powers and can initiate or veto legislation. Other

presidential powers include the nomination of candidates for positions in constitutional and federal courts, and for the position of General Prosecutor, despite the fact that these institutions are generally meant to control the president's actions.

The concentration of power in the hands of the president and the consequent focus of political parties on presidential races created barriers to electoral cooperation. During the Yel'tsin administration, despite the introduction of the 5% parliamentary entry threshold and other participation barriers, a large number of parties and electoral blocs competed in parliamentary elections (43 in 1995 and 28 in 1999). This fragmentation of the party system can partly be explained by electoral strategies of parties, who tended to treat the Duma elections (preceding presidential elections) as a presidential primary and therefore, were unwilling to merge or engage in coalitions (Gel'man 1999; Robinson 2018, p. 156).

The strong Russian presidency creates similar barriers to contemporary inter-party cooperation. Although many opposition politicians declare their intention to limit presidential powers and establish a stronger system of checks and balances, there is a general understanding that a democratic transition cannot be achieved without defeating the incumbent in a presidential election. Consequently, a presidential campaign is a powerful tool for opposition members to promote their agenda and an opportunity for anti-regime politicians to gain nationwide recognition and increase their popularity. For this reason, even weak candidates, who have little chance of challenging the incumbent, are generally reluctant to withdraw from the election in favour of a stronger opposition candidate. For example, prior to the 2018 presidential election opposition parties failed to select a single nominee, which resulted in two opposition candidates competing against each other, while the third and most popular one, Alexey Navalny, who was denied participation, launched a powerful boycott campaign. Moreover, the negative effects of presidential ambitions on coalition-building are not limited to presidential elections: they pose a significant barrier to mergers between opposition parties, their cooperation during parliamentary elections and in some cases, lead to party splits. For example, the refusal of the united political party Parnas to endorse Vladimir Milov as a presidential candidate in 2011 played an important role in his decision to leave the party and establish an independent political organisation. Although attempts were made to manage leaders' ambitions through the introduction of primaries as a tool to select the most popular candidates for elections at various levels, the organisers faced numerous challenges, including the difficulty of developing rules that all parties would agree to follow and enforcing the results.

Finally, Russian presidentialism, in combination with the underdeveloped party system, encourages leader-centric party politics. Parties that are not associated with specific political leaders or are unable to nominate a presidential candidate struggle to attract sufficient support and resources. This refers, for example, to the 5th of December Party, which was built around the principle of decentralisation. The central role of party leaders in the negotiation process reduces opportunities for inter-party cooperation and potentially beneficial mergers, as leadership incompatibilities tend to outweigh the interests of party members.

Other institutional factors, such as specific characteristics of the electoral system, have shown little impact on the coalition-formation among contemporary opposition parties in Russia. For example, cooperation trends remained largely unaffected by the change of electoral system from fully proportional to a mixed one in 2013. The ban on the formation of electoral blocs, which significantly constrained inter-party cooperation at the time of its introduction (in 2004), could not fully account for more recent divisions, considering that the majority of opposition parties remain unregistered. At the same time, institutional incentives for cooperation also have a limited effect: the relatively high 5% parliamentary entry threshold, which should encourage cooperation during legislative elections, does not result in broad opposition coalitions. During the 2016 State Duma election, for example, despite some coalition-building attempts, opposition parties Yabloko and Parnas competed against each other, both failing to clear the threshold or gain any seats.

Non-institutional constraints generally have a more significant impact on coalition-formation among anti-regime parties, compared to electoral legislation; this includes divisive strategies of the regime that create a distrust within the opposition community and the high degree of uncertainty, associated with manipulations of electoral process beyond legal boundaries.

Similarly, participation of opposition parties and candidates in elections is determined primarily by non-institutional factors: over the course of the analysed period (2011-2019) non-systemic parties developed effective strategies for overcoming legal barriers, including successful signature collection campaigns to fulfil candidate registration requirements or membership recruitment in order to qualify for party registration. Exclusion of parties and politicians from the political process is less a matter of restrictive legislation than a deliberate division of the opposition forces by the ruling elite into various categories with a view to provoking internal conflicts and weakening the opposition movement. Political parties, who agree to cooperate with the regime, enjoy

certain privileges, such as access to financial resources and the ability to participate in the electoral process without the threat of repression. This category includes parliamentary parties CPRF, LDPR and Just Russia, as well as a range of extra-parliamentary political entities, which function as spoiler parties aiming to draw votes away from the liberal opposition (examples include the Party of Growth and New People) and strong systemic parties (Communists of Russia or the Communist Party of Social Justice, designed to split the communist vote). However, even within the independent opposition, different political parties and politicians face unequal challenges: for example, despite fulfilling the same registration requirements, some parties are given the registered status by the Ministry of Justice (or are allowed to preserve it), while others are excluded from the electoral process completely and forced to negotiate the nomination of their candidates with their registered counterparts. Similarly, fulfilling the signature collection requirements does not guarantee opposition candidates registration for an election: some opposition politicians are allowed to participate, whereas others are denied registration. This unequal treatment does not generally lead to unity around the few registered parties or a consolidated support for the approved candidates but rather, creates tensions and divisions among the opposition members.

1.4 Research methods and the main findings

My findings, which are outlined in the diagram below, are based on case studies and qualitative interview analysis. Relying on a wide range of primary sources, such as videos of party congresses, interviews with opposition leaders and their social media posts, I analyse two cases of party splits and two unsuccessful coalition-building attempts: the case of a merged opposition party RPR-Parnas that experienced internal divisions in 2011 and 2014 (chapter 3), the establishment and activities of the Opposition Coordination Council in 2012-2013 (chapter 4) and the formation of the Democratic Coalition that fell apart during the 2016 parliamentary election (chapter 4). These cases present the most significant attempts of opposition forces to create a formal opposition alliance during Putin's era. In all of the aforementioned cases, diverse opposition forces gathered with a view to creating a long-lasting structure capable of coordinating opposition's activities (in the case of Opposition Coordination Council) and electing their representatives to various governing bodies (in the case of RPR-Parnas and the Democratic Coalition). There were other cases of cooperation between opposition forces that occurred spontaneously, such as the collective organisation of protests against electoral fraud in 2011-2012 or the unity of diverse activists around Alexey Navalny's mayoral campaign

in 2013. However, those cases were not associated with the formation of long-term alliances, which is why they do not present the primary focus of my analysis. There were also other cases of intra-party divisions that were excluded from my analysis, such as the split within the political party DemVybor in 2015-2016, when its chairman Vladimir Milov left the party, along with a group of his supporters. The small size of the party and its relatively low level of significance within the opposition at the time of the split did not merit in-depth analysis of that case. By contrast, the cases of division selected in my study had long-lasting consequences in terms of development of the opposition movement and future cooperation between its political forces. Moreover, selected cases demonstrate the most common causes of opposition fragmentation in Russia during the analysed period.

In order to explore intra-opposition divisions in more depth, I interviewed 19 Moscow-based opposition activists and local leaders, who were affiliated with one or several of the following non-systemic forces: political parties Civic Initiative, DemVybor, the Libertarian Party, Parnas, the Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation, Yabloko and the 5th of December Party, the movement Solidarity and the political organisation Open Russia. In addition, some interviewees identified as members of Maxim Katz's team – a well-known Moscow politician and a co-founder of the non-profit organisation Urban Projects Foundation that aims to improve urban planning and development in Russia. At the time of interviews this group of activists was integrated into the political party Yabloko.

During the analysed period the Progress Party (also known as People's Alliance and Russia of the Future) was closely linked to the Anti-Corruption Foundation – a non-profit organisation, established by Alexey Navalny, that investigates cases of corruption among Russian officials. As both political entities had the same federal-level leaders (Alexey Navalny, Leonid Volkov and others), it can often be difficult to distinguish between their activities and therefore, in most of my chapters they are used interchangeably. The relationship between these organisations is explained in more detail in chapter 5, based on the accounts of its members.

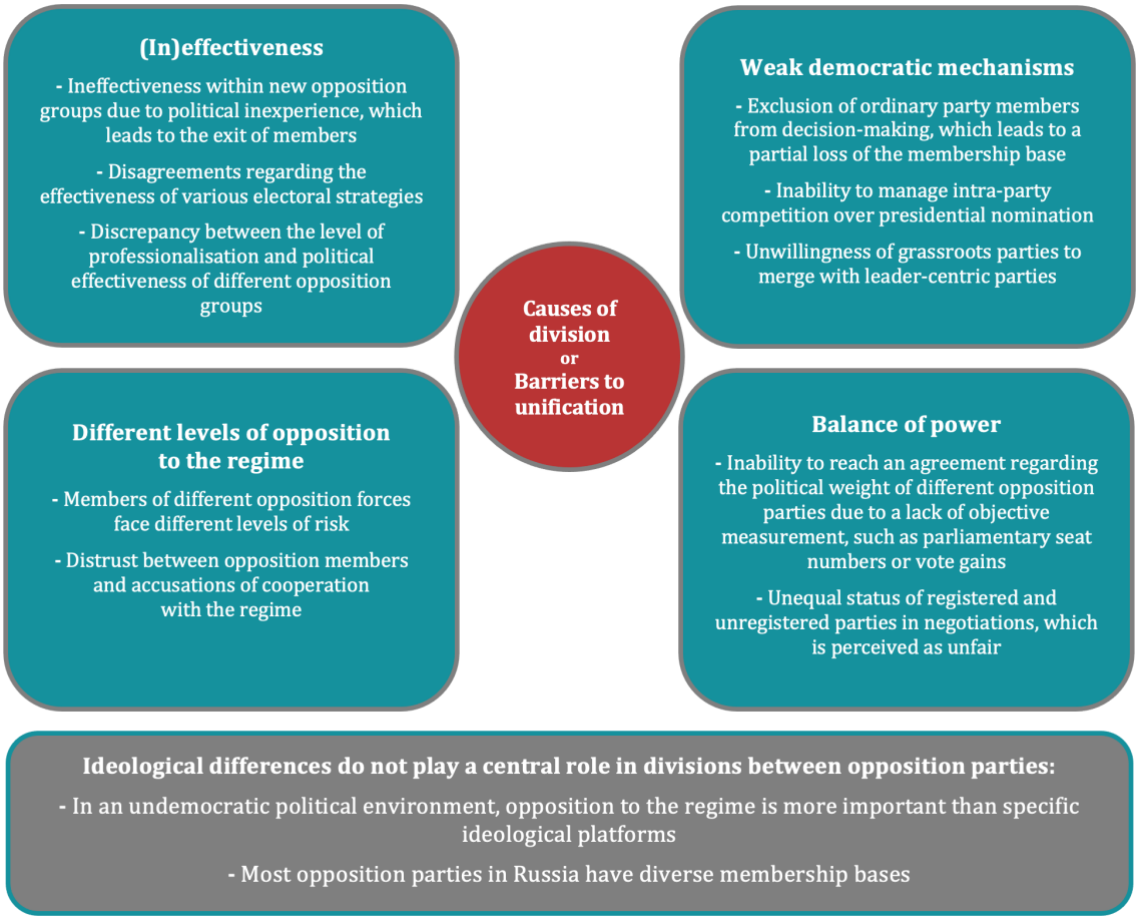
I interviewed at least two opposition members from each of the larger, more politically significant parties (such as the Progress Party or Yabloko) and at least one opposition member from each of the smaller or less politically significant parties (such as Civic Initiative or the Libertarian Party). Some of the interviewed activists switched parties or participated in political activities of different parties at different times. The full list of interviewees is available in appendix 1.1. All interview data is anonymised.

Interviews were semi-structured. They were conducted in 2018-2019 but the topics were not limited to that period: interviewees were asked a wide range of questions regarding successful and unsuccessful cases of inter-party cooperation between 2011 and 2019, including attempts to establish electoral coalitions and the reasons behind their breakdown. They were also asked to report on the main reasons for selecting their political party, express their attitudes towards the idea of a merger with another party and their opinions regarding the main barriers to mergers and coalition-formation. The latter category of questions allowed me to identify the main differences between contemporary opposition parties and the activists' justification for preserving the independent status of minor parties. The general questionnaire presented in appendix 1.2 includes questions that all interviewees were asked. Some of them were asked additional questions, depending on the responses and their party affiliation. For example, members of Yabloko were asked about the primary election within their party that was held in 2018, which led to some internal divisions. Interviewees, who had a better knowledge of certain cases of inter-party cooperation or divisions, were asked further questions regarding these cases.

Qualitative analysis of my interview data plays an important role in my study: it helped me to gain a better understanding of the analysed cases (chapters 3 and 4) and verify the results of my case study by acquiring valuable knowledge regarding intra-opposition cooperation and divisions during the analysed period. Moreover, the gathered interview data allowed me to take into consideration the perspective of activists, in addition to the party leaders' perspective, which is more readily available through the media and other open sources.

Based on my analysis of the aforementioned cases and interview data, I identify a range of internal factors that contributed to divisions within the non-systemic opposition during the analysed period or posed barriers to inter-party cooperation. These factors are divided into four broad categories, summarised in the diagram below: ineffectiveness of political activities or electoral strategies, weak democratic mechanisms within parties and coalitions, different levels of opposition to the regime among opposition members and disagreements regarding the balance of power within parties and coalitions.

Figure 1: summary of findings



1.4.1 Ineffectiveness

During the wave of mass protests against electoral fraud in 2011-2012, the opposition movement in Russia underwent a period of rapid growth: many activists with no previous political experience joined the opposition, as well as new political leaders with no prior record of coalition-building. As a result, some of the newly formed opposition parties and coalitions experienced difficulties that were typical for earlier political groups that emerged during the *perestroika* period: they struggled to organise effective political activities due to the inability of members to prioritise practical tasks over broad discussions or debates on minor procedural issues. The desire of members to appear democratic and provide an opportunity for everyone to engage in discussions hampered any meaningful political activity and led to the exit of many members. The Opposition Coordination Council, the broad coalition of opposition leaders that formed in 2012, was particularly affected by this issue; this case is analysed in more detail in chapter 4.

Later, as opposition groups developed, some of them achieved a higher degree of professionalisation than others, leading to differences in the effectiveness of their political activities. For example, members of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, a highly

professionalised political structure, were often reluctant to engage in alliances with registered parties (such as Parnas or Yabloko) due to their reputation as ineffective political forces that were incapable of managing successful electoral activities. For example, the inability of Parnas to organise an effective primary and election campaign was among the reasons for the breakdown of the Democratic Coalition in 2016, when crucial coalition members left the alliance (chapter 4).

The debate on the effectiveness of various electoral strategies also tended to divide opposition members during the analysed period. In the early 2010s opposition members debated on the feasibility of electoral participation, considering the fraudulent nature of the electoral process in Russia. Opposition politicians presented contrasting arguments in favour of and against protest voting, an election boycott and a ballot-spoiling strategy – these arguments are explored in chapter 3. Opposition members disagreed on the potential effectiveness of election participation attempts at the national, regional and local levels. During the later years, as the 'participation' side won greater public support, this debate transformed into a discussion on the effectiveness of various types of protest voting. For example, in 2019 Alexey Navalny's proposal to vote for any candidate, who had a chance to defeat United Russia in their districts (the so-called "smart voting" strategy) received much criticism within the opposition community. Some opposition members were reluctant to support ideologically distant 'systemic' candidates, promoting anti-democratic agenda, and instead, proposed to focus opposition's efforts on supporting their allies in a small number of districts. Others, however, endorsed Alexey Navalny's strategy as the most effective within the given circumstances.

Ineffective management of political activities was highlighted by the majority of interviewees among the primary factors contributing to the breakdown of opposition coalitions and posing a barrier to successful cooperation between opposition forces (chapters 5 and 6). As the interviewees explained, ineffective political forces were more likely to hold other coalition members back, rather than offer a positive contribution.

1.4.2 Weak democratic mechanisms

Despite the opposition's goal of democratising the country, most opposition parties lack internal democratic mechanisms that could facilitate regular leadership rotation, ensure leadership accountability and establish a sufficient level of decentralisation – both geographical (Moscow-regions) and vertical (leadership-activists). Decentralisation implies the ability of ordinary party members to influence crucial decision-making, representation of regions in the party's governing bodies and a degree of autonomy of

regional branches, including issues related to membership recruitment and other localised decisions.

Weak democratic mechanisms within the Russian parties present another important factor that contributed to intra-opposition divisions. Active members tended to leave their parties if they were excluded from decision-making, as happened in the case of Parnas in 2016, described in chapter 4. Promising politicians were deterred from joining parties organised around specific personalities, as they had no chance of competing for leadership positions (chapter 5). Less centralised political groups were unwilling to merge with the leader-centric parties, despite their limited resources and potential electoral benefits of a unification (chapter 6). For example, the 5th of December Party, organised around the idea of decentralised, activist-led politics, rejected the offer of a larger political party Parnas to merge due to its leader-centric structure. In addition, the non-transparent and uncompetitive process of presidential candidate selection in some parties (including Parnas, Yabloko, Civic Initiative) created incentives for politicians to establish new parties, instead of attempting to compete for the nomination within the existing ones – one such case is described in chapter 3. Moreover, it was difficult to hold party leaders accountable for their political mistakes or poor electoral performance, as these failures could often be blamed on the undemocratic electoral process in Russia; this resulted in the inability to change unpopular party leaders.

Some attempts were made to meet the demand for a greater democratisation of opposition structures. One of them was the 2012 election to the Opposition Coordination Council – a coalition of opposition leaders, which was supposed to represent diverse opposition groups (chapter 4). Any person, sharing opposition's core values and goals could become a candidate or register as a voter. The declared goal of the election to this new political body was in democratising and decentralising Russian democratic movement by allowing ordinary opposition members (including regional activists) to select their leaders, who would then be responsible for coordination of opposition's activities. However, the election largely failed to achieve this goal: the Coordination Council appeared to be even more centralised than the existing opposition parties, who were often criticised for their Moscow-centricity. This was partly due to the location of the Council's meetings (Moscow), which discouraged regional members from participating in the Council's activities due to high travel costs. Moreover, in the absence of feedback mechanisms, the Council's political agenda quickly became detached from the activities of opposition activists on the ground.

There were multiple attempts to introduce primaries as a more democratic tool of candidate selection that could involve ordinary opposition members in decision-making, reduce the influence of the personal connections factor and prevent divisions over the nomination. This tool could be particularly useful during federal-level elections with a high level of intra-opposition competition over the top places on the party list or presidential candidacy. However, the idea of holding primaries and other similar mechanisms, offered by opposition leaders (such as the introduction of online voting tools for party members), did not achieve the desired outcome because ordinary opposition members tended to be excluded from decisions that directly affected the interests of party leaders. For example, in 2015 during regional elections, when the stakes were relatively low, primary elections were held successfully (chapter 4). By contrast, prior to the 2012 presidential election Parnas' leaders refused to delegate the decision regarding the presidential nomination to party members (chapter 3). During the 2016 parliamentary campaign primary voters were also excluded from the selection of a candidate to lead the Parnas party list (chapter 4). In the latter two cases, disagreements regarding the candidate nomination led to divisions within the party.

1.4.3 Different levels of opposition to the regime

Although political groups within the non-systemic opposition expressed the same attitude towards Putin's regime, they differed in their anti-regime rhetoric and means of political participation. Members of some political forces (such as the Anti-Corruption Foundation) were willing to accept higher personal risks and therefore, engaged in riskier activities, such as the organisation of street protest rallies or exposing cases of corruption among high-ranking officials. Others avoided political activities that were perceived as overly risky and instead, preferred to focus exclusively on electoral participation or local-level projects. The former group focused on personal attacks against the President as the core of the Russian regime, and put forward uncompromising demands, such as the President's resignation and dissolution of the illegitimate parliament. The latter group rejected these demands as unrealistic and ineffective: in their view, the uncompromising rhetoric could deter a significant number of potential supporters who were not prepared to face high risks associated with this confrontation. This distinction between the two groups created a distrust between them and presented a barrier to their consolidation. The uncompromising wing of the Russian opposition frequently accused their opponents of cooperation with the regime, labelling some opposition parties as semi-systemic or systemic (examples include Yabloko and Civic Initiative). Others argued that these

accusations were merely a tool to discredit their competitors within the opposition. This debate is explored in chapters 3 and 5.

1.4.4 Balance of power

Disagreements regarding the balance of power within parties and coalitions presented another source of division within the non-systemic opposition. Coalition-building in an undemocratic environment can be complicated by a lack of objective measurement of a party's political weight (such as parliamentary seat numbers, regional representation or even vote gains) that would determine its power within a coalition. Popular opposition parties are often denied registration for political reasons and therefore, are unable to demonstrate their electoral strength. Registered parties, who are approved to participate in elections, face the fraudulent electoral process that disadvantages opposition candidates. Membership numbers are also a poor indicator of a party's political significance: both historically and during recent years, liberal-democratic parties preferred to avoid mass activist recruitment, relying primarily on a circle of informal supporters (White 2011, p. 669). The case of political party Parnas in 2011 presented an exception to this rule: the party recruited 40 thousand members in order to qualify for registration; however, after the threshold was lowered to just 500 members in 2012, Parnas gradually lost most of its membership base. Determining approval ratings of individual opposition leaders is also a challenging task, as some of them are excluded from elections. Moreover, there is no independent opinion polling that would be trusted by members of all non-systemic parties. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between a consequence of electoral fraud and genuine unpopularity of a weak opposition candidate (or a candidate holding a weak election campaign). As a result, party leaders struggle to achieve an agreement on the balance of power within a coalition or a merged party.

The presence of party registration is viewed as an unfair advantage by members of unregistered parties due to the politically motivated nature of the party registration process. For example, some members of the Democratic Coalition (2015-2016) argued that Parnas did not deserve its leading role within the coalition, based primarily on the party's registered status, rather than a significant contribution of resources (chapter 4). In their view, existing party licenses belonged to the opposition movement as a whole, rather than specific parties or their leaders. Therefore, registered opposition parties had a moral obligation to share their license with others by nominating the strongest opposition candidates, regardless of their party affiliation. Others disagreed with that viewpoint, arguing that parties were entitled to prioritise the interests of their own candidates.

A similar debate regarding the party license ownership occurred within the party RPR-Parnas in 2014, when its leaders disagreed on the balance of power within the party (chapter 3). One of them, Vladimir Ryzhkov, who had personally invested significant resources in obtaining a party registration through the European Court of Human Rights[1], insisted on preserving additional powers within the party, whereas other leaders argued in favour of equal powers. This conflict resulted in a split, with Vladimir Ryzhkov and his allies leaving the party.

The dominant role of Alexey Navalny and the Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation within the opposition posed an additional barrier to coalition-formation and party mergers, making any alliance with their participation unattractive for other parties and their leaders. Opposition parties were reluctant to merge with Alexey Navalny's powerful organisations due to the fear of being sidelined, resulting in the inability to promote their agenda or nominate their politicians (chapter 6).

1.4.5 Ideological disagreements

Ideological disagreements generally did not play a central role in divisions between contemporary liberal-democratic parties in Russia during the analysed period (2011-2019).

During the Yel'tsin and early Putin presidencies there was a clear ideological divide between the political party Yabloko and the economic liberal bloc, represented at different times by political parties Russia's Choice, Democratic Choice of Russia and SPS (Union of Right Forces). Yabloko advocated for milder economic reforms and greater social protection, while the economic liberals supported more rapid and radical economic reforms, as well as wider freedoms for business. Moreover, in 1999 Yabloko and SPS expressed contrasting opinions on the issue of Chechnya, with the former opposing Putin's military campaign and the latter endorsing it.

However, as the regime became more authoritarian during the later years, ideological incompatibilities between opposition parties became less important than their mutual opposition to Putin's regime. Opposition forces could overcome their ideological differences by focusing on their common goal of achieving democratisation and demands for basic political freedoms and human rights. In the 2010s, only the Libertarian Party had strictly enforced ideological checks, whereas other opposition parties tended to

[1] In 2012 the European Court of Human Rights recognised the withdrawal of RPR's party license (2007) as unlawful, which allowed Parnas to obtain party registration through a formal merger with RPR.

accept activists with diverse ideological positions, as long as they shared the opposition's core goal of regime change.

Ideological discussions did occur when the position of some opposition members was perceived as overly radical. For example, the inclusion of radical nationalist forces in the Opposition Coordination Council provoked debates within the opposition community (chapter 4). Similarly, the decision of Parnas' leadership to nominate the candidate Vyacheslav Mal'tsev, whose political agenda was viewed as populist, was opposed by many party members (chapter 4). However, even in those cases ideological disagreements were a contributory factor, rather than the primary cause of division. In 2013 some opposition politicians were reluctant to endorse Alexey Navalny as a Moscow mayoral candidate due to his nationalist and anti-migrant rhetoric; at the same time, his campaign united activists from every point on the ideological spectrum (chapter 3).

Opposition members tended to agree on the need to temporarily set aside their ideological differences in order to form a negative consensus coalition against the ruling party. However, other types of disagreements were more challenging to overcome (those related to ineffectiveness, weak democratic mechanisms, accusations of cooperation with the regime or unfair balance of power). Coalition members had little incentive to remain within a coalition if they believed that their partners interfered with its productivity due to the ineffectiveness of their activities. It was also difficult to justify the preservation of an alliance that served the interests of specific leaders, rather than the democratic movement as a whole. Furthermore, a coalition could not survive without a degree of trust between its members and the belief that participants were working towards a mutual goal.

1.4.6 Cooperation trends

Analysis of my interview data allowed me to outline additional trends related to inter-party cooperation within the opposition. Interviewed party members expressed contrasting attitudes towards different forms of cooperation: they tended to favour tactical, case-by-case cooperation over longer-term alliances or mergers due to the negative experience of coalition-building in the past. They noted that informal, spontaneous coalitions proved to be more successful: examples included Alexey Navalny's Moscow mayoral campaign in 2013, when activists with diverse party affiliations united around a popular candidate without any prior inter-party agreements, or the 2017 Moscow municipal campaign, when municipal candidates cooperated with each other to avoid intra-opposition competition. In addition, many interviewees argued

that during the analysed period cooperation was better at the activist level, compared to the leadership level. These and other trends are discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.

1.5 Conclusion

Studies of opposition coordination highlight a number of significant differences between inter-party cooperation in democratic and non-democratic regimes, including unequal challenges and benefits for cooperating parties (Gandhi and Reuter 2008; 2013). Opposition parties under authoritarianism have greater incentives to form alliances, as a broad anti-regime coalition is more likely to defeat the incumbents and force a regime to democratise. The benefits of a cross-ideological alliance include the reduction of intra-opposition competition and the opportunity to build the image of a strong and united opposition, which voters will perceive as a real alternative to the ruling party. Within an authoritarian context, the benefits of coalition-building are rarely understood purely in terms of combining previous electoral results of coalition members – due to the instability of the party system, a united opposition front is capable of generating far greater support than the sum of its parts. At the same time, opposition forces face greater barriers to unification within an undemocratic political environment, compared to political forces in democracies.

The literature on the topic of coalition-building in non-democracies outlines a range of external factors influencing opposition fragmentation that can be divided into three categories: institutional characteristics, factors related to the political environment and difficulties associated with underdeveloped party systems.

The main institutional factor that tends to hamper inter-party cooperation is extensive presidential powers, recognised by the constitution, which complicate the negotiation process due to the presidential ambitions of opposition politicians and the fear of broken agreements post-election (Gandhi 2008). A strong presidency can discourage both presidential electoral coalitions and potentially beneficial mergers between minor parties if their leaders plan to compete for the presidential post in the future. This often implies that parties can only afford to have one leader with presidential ambitions per electoral cycle if they are to avoid conflicts and splits. Other institutional characteristics that generally determine coalition-building in democracies, such as specific features of the electoral system, do not seem to affect coalitions in authoritarian regimes, as they are outweighed by more influential factors, related to the political environment and party systems (Gandhi and Reuter 2013).

The second category includes a wide range of tools, used by the regime to weaken and divide the opposition, and manipulate the electoral process in violation of the existing legislation. While political repressions against the opposition do not deter coalitions from forming (Gandhi and Reuter 2013), other characteristics of an undemocratic political environment, including electoral fraud and the incumbent's potential unwillingness to yield power, contribute to a high level of uncertainty surrounding the electoral process and complicate the development of joint electoral strategies by parties. The most powerful and widespread tool used by authoritarian leaders is the strategy of dividing the opposition by offering certain privileges to some parties, while excluding others from the formal political process entirely (Lust-Okar 2004).

The third category of factors is related to the characteristics of party systems, which tend to be underdeveloped and unstable in non-democracies. A lack of well-established reputations of political parties, combined with the leader-centric party politics that increases the role of political ambitions, deter coalition-formation. For this reason, the presence of at least one stable opposition party can encourage parties to enter electoral agreements (Gandhi and Reuter 2013).

Another group of studies, described in chapter 2, focuses on the internal causes of opposition fragmentation and offers valuable insights into divisions between Russian liberal-democratic parties during the *perestroika* period, the Yel'tsin and early Putin presidencies (Fish 1995; White 2005; 2006). During the late 1980s-early 1990s the inability of parties to unite in coalitions was primarily associated with political inexperience of their members and the consequent inability to prioritise important political goals over discussions on broad ideological issues (Fish 1995). Later divisions between pro-reform parties (in particular, between Yabloko and the economic liberal bloc) were explained by a range of factors that are more typical for parties in democracies, including policy differences and distinct social bases of support (White 2006). Although some parallels can be drawn between these historical cases and contemporary divisions within the Russian democratic movement, the changing political environment and the emergence of a new generation of political parties in 2011-2012 require an up-to-date examination of this phenomenon.

The case study chapters (3 and 4) explore different combinations of factors that caused divisions between contemporary opposition forces in Russia. These cases highlight the most common causes of opposition fragmentation. Chapters 5 and 6 report on the interview results, which examine the same factors in more depth and present the perspective of ordinary party members.

By exploring internal causes of division within the Russian democratic movement, my study contributes to a better understanding of opposition politics in Russia, offering a valuable addition to the body of literature on the topic. The original contribution to the knowledge primarily lies in the empirical part of my work. However, this work does not claim to offer a generalisable theory: further research (a cross-national study) is required in order to determine whether the factors identified in this thesis could account for opposition fragmentation in other non-democratic regimes.

Chapter 2. Opposition Fragmentation Before 2011

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on a range of factors that posed a barrier to inter-party cooperation between Russian liberal-democratic parties during the *perestroika* period, the Yel'tsin and first Putin presidencies. The first section highlights difficulties with party formation and consolidation during *perestroika* and early 1990s. The second section focuses on internal and party specific factors that contributed to divisions between parties and prevented the formation of a broad anti-communist coalition. These divisions were rooted in the issue of collective identity formation – party members were unwilling to unite with other parties due to the threat of losing their newly formed identities (Fish 1995). In addition, party members struggled to focus on practical tasks and engaged in lengthy debates on overly abstract issues, which led to internal divisions. This was largely due to the political inexperience of party members and a lack of experience in coalition-building. Another factor that contributed to divisions within parties was related to the choice between a party's organisational strategy – prioritising openness or achieving a greater level of professionalisation, which party members disagreed on.

The third section describes later divisions between liberal-democratic parties (Yabloko and the economic liberals), which were explained by a different set of factors, including differences in their ideological positioning, electoral strategies and their contrasting attitudes towards the regime that deterred parties from engaging in coalitions. Yabloko identified as a social democratic party and offered its voters greater social protection, whereas Yegor Gaidar's party and later SPS (economic liberals) campaigned for prioritising rapid economic reforms. Moreover, these parties differed in their attitude towards Yel'tsin, with Yabloko remaining in opposition to the President and the economic liberals, who started as a governmental force, supporting some of his policies.

This chapter provides a historical overview of the causes of opposition fragmentation in Russia, some of which can be useful for understanding divisions between contemporary opposition parties. Some parallels could be drawn between the difficulties in coalition-building among the early reformist parties during the *perestroika* period and the later divisions experienced by a new generation of democratic political forces in the early 2010s. In both cases, their members struggled to organise effective political work and establish successful alliances due to their political inexperience and the desire to follow internal democratic principles that interfered with any productive activity, which led to the loss of members. Later, as contemporary political forces developed and gained

experience in political participation, disparities emerged in the level of their political effectiveness, which tended to cause divisions, as more effective forces were reluctant to engage in alliances with the less effective ones.

However, most of the factors that contributed to divisions between Yabloko and the economic liberals could not explain opposition fragmentation during the period analysed in this work (2011-2019), primarily due to changes in the nature of the Russian regime. Ideological differences between democratic parties became less important as the regime transitioned towards greater authoritarianism during Putin's later terms. Contemporary opposition parties had similar social bases of support and expressed the same attitude towards Putin's government, although some opposition members were frequently accused of covert cooperation with the regime. Contrary to the earlier situation, during the analysed period Yabloko was often criticised for accepting compromises, whereas the successor of SPS, political party Parnas, was viewed as a more uncompromising opponent of the regime.

2.2 Parties during perestroika and the early 1990s

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not lead to the formation of strong parties in Russia (Robinson 2018; Wyman et al. 1995; Fish 1995). When the ban on multi-party competition was lifted, a variety of organisations emerged, however, the majority of them were single-issue lobby groups or groups campaigning for *perestroika*, rather than proper political parties with mass memberships. Without experience of multi-party competition during pre-communist period, people tended to develop loyalty "towards personalities or governments, rather than parties" (Wyman et al. 1995, p. 536). The Communist Party of the Russian Federation remained the strongest political party in the parliament throughout the 1990s. Two categories of parties appeared, which Stephen White, Matthew Wyman and Olga Kryshtanovskaya (1995, p. 185) describe as "vanguard parties" and "movement parties". The former category contained parties, which emerged out of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, whereas the latter category resembled broad coalitions without strict party discipline.

There were a number of factors that prevented new parties from transforming into strong organisations with a mass following. Political activism was only developing in larger cities, so parties found it challenging to establish local roots throughout the country (Robinson 2018, p. 152). Parties tended to rely on television as the main campaigning tool during elections, which meant that they did not have to invest resources in the development of regional branches, which generally facilitate direct interaction with the

electorate through canvassing, leaflet distribution and meetings with voters (Wyman et al. 1995, p. 539). Reliance on television campaigns also implied excessive focus on party leaders.

A survey conducted in 1992 in 12 urban areas in Russia revealed that parties were viewed as insignificant in Russian politics (White et al. 1995). Another survey of almost 6000 voters conducted in 1993-1994 demonstrated a low level of trust in parties within Russian society, compared to other institutions – only 6% of respondents expressed trust in parties (Wyman et al. 1995). This was largely a consequence of the 70-year-long oppressive single-party regime, which contributed to antipathy towards partisan structures in Russia (Ishiyama 1999, p. 189). Other surveys revealed that Russian population attached little value "to notions of diversity, dissent and political tolerance" and had "little understanding of the role of opposition" (Fleron et al. 1998, p. 229).

The vast majority of parties remained weak, fractious and extremely small, for which they were labelled "taxi parties", as their membership could allegedly fit into one taxi (Robinson 2018, pp. 151-152). Some parallels could be drawn between these early parties and present-day minor opposition parties, such as the 5th of December Party, whose regional branches comprise of just a few members; they are often treated by opposition members as "discussion clubs", rather than proper political parties.

Both during the early 1990s and during the later stages stronger parties and political organisations tended to be organised around specific personalities (such as Democratic Russia – around Boris Yeltsin, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia – around Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Yabloko – around Grigory Yavlinsky, Yury Boldyrev and Vladimir Lukin). This was largely a consequence of strong presidency in Russia, which interfered with the party development (Ishiyama 1999). The movement Democratic Russia that united pro-democracy political forces, which emerged prior to the first multi-party election in 1990, was too diverse to be transformed into a party (Brudny 2013). Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union devalued political entities, such as Democratic Russia, whose sole purpose was campaigning for regime change. There were additional difficulties: a lack of middle class and private property did not allow liberal parties to develop strong and distinct political programmes (Fleron et al. 1998).

Some legislative attempts were made to facilitate consolidation of the party system in Russia throughout the 1990s. A mixed electoral system was introduced in 1993, which combined proportional (PR) and majoritarian components (SMD) (Sakwa 1995; White and McAllister 1999). Half of the State Duma (lower branch of the Russian Parliament "Federal Assembly") was elected through party lists, combining the national list and

regional groups, the second half consisted of deputies from single-member constituencies. The PR element was meant to encourage the party development (White and McAllister 1999), while the majoritarian element was expected to ensure better representation of regional interests and create "incentives to merge" (D'Anieri 2007, p. 57). A 5% threshold for entering the State Duma was adopted in order to reduce the number of small parties on the ballot (Sakwa 1995; White and McAllister 1999; Brudny 2001). Further electoral reform, adopted prior to the 1995 election, along with other changes, raised the signature threshold: parties were now required to gather 200,000 signatures in order to be registered for an election, compared to 100,000, required in the previous election (White and McAllister 1999). Again, the amendment was expected to motivate parties to merge or join in blocs. The reality, however, did not meet expectations. In the 1995 parliamentary election voters faced a "confusing choice between 43 parties and electoral groups" (Robinson 1998, p. 160). Some additional measures had to be taken in order to avoid hyper-fragmentation of the party system (Rose 2000). The amendments that followed further increased the barrier for participation in elections. The Central Electoral Commission was granted additional powers: it became responsible for verifying 20% of the 200,000 signatures and disqualifying parties with 15% or more invalid signatures, as well as candidates, whose submitted documentation did not meet the required standards (Brudny 2001). Parties also had the option of paying a deposit of over 2 million roubles if they wished to avoid the signature collection process; however, in cases where less than 3% of votes were won, the deposit was withheld. All of these measures made it beneficial for small parties to accumulate resources.

Prior to the 1995 legislative election some electoral blocs were formed, such as Democratic Choice of Russia-United Democrats, led by Yegor Gaidar. However, the aforementioned legislative amendments failed to facilitate party system consolidation. There was still oversupply of minor parties with little chance of overcoming electoral threshold (Rose 2000).

2.3 Divisions between parties

2.3.1 Collective identity formation

Democratic parties that formed in the late 1980s-early 1990s struggled to create a broad anti-communist coalition. One case that illustrates opposition fragmentation during that period is the failure to unite political parties SDPR (the Social-Democratic Party of Russia) and RPR (the Republican Party of Russia), both established not long before the fall of the Soviet Union. SDPR emerged from the Social Democratic Association that

combined several democratically-oriented groups in the late 1980s. RPR was a successor to the Democratic Platform – a liberal faction of the Communist Party (CPSU), whose members attempted to reform the Communist Party and when this strategy proved unsuccessful, established an independent Republican Party.

The question of an inter-party alliance was discussed within the two parties in 1990-1991, with many members and leaders publicly supporting the idea of a full merger (Fish 1995). Proponents of the union argued about the need to join forces within the context of rapid political changes, considering their shared goal of defeating the communist regime. A merger offered significant strategic advantages: neither of these parties alone was large or powerful enough to challenge the Communist Party, whereas combined, they had a potential to become the most influential party within the democratic movement at the time (Urban et al. 1997, p. 215). However, despite the benefits of consolidation, the merger was never implemented; moreover, this proposal triggered conflicts and division within the parties.

Opponents of the merger justified their position by the ideological incompatibilities between RPR and SDPR. Republicans, who supported rapid economic reforms, argued that the social-democratic ideology of SDPR had no place in the new democratic Russia after socialism had discredited itself. In their view, at least for the period of transition any socialist ideas had to be abandoned in favour of the liberal approach, based on market capitalism. Members of the Social-Democratic party, who favoured milder reforms and greater social support, feared that Republicans would adopt a radical libertarian approach, unsuitable for the Russian political and economic reality (Fish 1995, p. 89; White 2006, p. 71).

However, as some authors argue, the division between the Republicans and Social Democrats could not be fully attributed to their ideological differences (Fish 1995; Urban et al. 1997). The political platforms of the two parties shared a common set of principle goals with regard to political and economic reforms, including the implementation of privatisation, establishment of European-style market capitalism and protection of civil liberties. In addition, both parties viewed the new middle class as their core electorate (Fish 1995, p. 89).

M. Steven Fish (1995) outlines a number of issues that contributed to divisions between RPR and SDPR and within them, largely arising from a lack of experience not only in political participation and coalition-building but in forming any independent associations, not affiliated with the state or the dominant party. Active party members had no prior opportunities to develop skills required for self-organisation, such as the

ability to reach an agreement regarding the group's image, strategy or collective actions. As a result, both parties found it challenging to establish functioning structures and organise effective political activities. Party members struggled to reach a consensus on various issues during internal meetings and congresses and were unable to make important collective decisions. As the author observed, a disproportionately long time was spent discussing insignificant organisational matters and overly general topics that were of little relevance with regard to the development of a party strategy or regular political activities of party members. Continuous discussions about "the situation in the country" (Fish 1995, p. 83) and heated debates over the interpretation of ongoing political events took time from discussions of more practical issues, such as membership recruitment or fundraising, and provoked conflicts within the parties – a phenomenon, which Fish labelled "the syndrome of ineffectiveness" (p. 94). The topic of a potential party merger caused even greater disarray and had to be abandoned, as it threatened to tear the parties apart.

The primary cause of division between the Republicans and the Social Democrats, according to Fish, was associated with the process of collective identity formation within the parties, which involved gaining a mutual understanding of the group's beliefs, goals and its role in the political process. The fear of losing a recently acquired sense of a group identity, established within the parties, created a barrier for consolidation. Other authors note that members of SDPR were particularly concerned about their collective identity and public image (Urban et al. 1997, p. 204). For example, during the founding congress the decision regarding the best way to address one another (whether to preserve or abandon "comrade") became an important part of discussion. Moreover, in an attempt to thoroughly define the party's social-democratic identity, members adopted a 60-page long programme (p. 206), which was too long for the average voter.

Social Democrats were unwilling to accept the compromises required for a successful merger with the Republicans, and predicted that such a unification would result in reputational damage to their public image. The negative attitude towards RPR members within the SDPR was partly related to the different origins of the two parties. Many Republicans were former members of the Communist Party. Social Democrats, on the other hand, were proud of their non-communist backgrounds; some party members had been dissidents and had lost career opportunities and in some cases had been subjected to political repressions (Fish 1995, p. 91; Urban et al. 1997). Republicans, in turn, emphasised their high scholarly level and strived to highlight their party's image as part of Russia's intellectual elite. At the same time, in order to eliminate any associations with

their communist past they sought to distance themselves from the socialist ideology, which made an alliance with SDPR unlikely.

Therefore, as the aforementioned scholars observe, identity-based party politics prevented members from adopting a degree of political pragmatism that would allow them to shift their focus towards more important practical matters, such as the organisation of effective political activities or engagement in potentially beneficial inter-party alliances.

2.3.2 Organisational strategy

Another source of division within political parties during the *perestroika* period was the conflict between different organisational strategies. Many of the newly established parties, including SDPR, emerged from various activist groups and were characterised by a chaotic organisational structure: members struggled to address ongoing organisational challenges, related to membership recruitment and management of party activities (Gel'man 1999). In order to improve productivity and ensure successful growth and development, parties had to achieve a greater degree of professionalisation, which implied "professional political consulting" (Gel'man 1999, p. 159), introducing a certain level of party discipline, as well as the exclusion of ineffective party members from the apparatus and their replacement with more effective managers. However, these measures were inconsistent with the parties' declared principle of openness and threatened to damage their reputation as truly democratic organisations. This choice between different organisational approaches presents a common dilemma for young parties, who often find it challenging to reconcile different values and achieve a balance between building an effective organisational structure and encouraging decentralisation and inclusive participation.

A shift towards an overly decentralised and open structure carries a number of disadvantages, as can be seen from the case of West German and Belgian ecology parties in the 1970s-1980s, described by Herbert Kitschelt (1988). Kitschelt highlights several organisational characteristics of these parties that led to internal conflicts and their disintegration into small activist groups. The parties emerged as an alternative to traditional left-wing parties, which activists criticised for their "centralized, bureaucratic organisation". Instead, they proposed to establish a new type of political parties, based on the principle of "political decentralisation" and "participatory democracy" (Kitschelt 1988, p. 127). The new parties had no stable leadership or membership, and participation in their activities was open to everyone (p. 136) – these organisational features, in

combination with the absence of professional politicians placed them closer to social movements or non-profit organisations, rather than conventional political parties.

In an attempt to remove the institution of elected party leaders and appointed executives, parties developed an informal hierarchy, including an informal party elite, who gained influence due to their charisma and networking skills (Kitschelt 1988, p. 130, 136). The functions of party executives were performed by non-professionals, working on a volunteer basis without any formal authority – the measure, aimed at eliminating material incentives for those seeking party posts. Unlike in traditional parties, where decisions are generally made by elected representatives during party congresses, the decision-making process within the new ecology parties took place during open meetings with varying participants. Party activists rejected the idea of formal membership in favour of openness and flexibility: anyone sharing their values could join the activities of the party and influence its decisions. This complicated the development of a coherent party programme or a clear strategy, as any decision could be overturned by a new configuration of members during the following meeting.

This chaotic organisational structure presented numerous challenges. Parties struggled to maintain a consistent level of activist participation: people tended to join in order to accomplish a specific task and often lost interest in party activities once it had been completed. Constant rotation was typical not only for ordinary members but also for party executives. Voluntary posts provided little incentive to remain in office for a long period: the duties were time-consuming and failed to provide any resources or formal influence within the party. As a result, positions were filled by members, who could dedicate sufficient time to attending numerous meetings, rather than by those with more experience or expertise. Moreover, important tasks, such as the development of party units, campaigning or membership recruitment were considered secondary and were largely overlooked in favour of addressing particular problems. This issue-based agenda, more typical for social movements, did not allow party members to focus their efforts on working with the electorate, which led to poor electoral performance.

2.4 Divisions between Yabloko and the economic liberals

During the first decade after *perestroika*, as more barriers to electoral participation were introduced, some inter-party alliances began to emerge, primarily in the form of electoral blocs. The number of minor parties remained too high, however. Moreover, the most promising pro-reform parties failed to create a wider electoral coalition. The inability of opposition forces to consolidate the democratic vote during legislative

elections contributed to successful electoral performance of the Communist Party in 1995 and 1999 and later, United Russia in 2003. Some scholars highlight ideological differences as a significant barrier to the formation of an anti-communist alliance between the social democrats, represented by Yabloko, and the economic liberals, represented at different times by Russia's Choice, Democratic Choice of Russia (DVR) and the Union of Right Forces (SPS) (Hale 2004; White 2006; 2011).

Russia's Choice started as a governmental bloc, led by Yegor Gaidar, which cooperated with the President Boris Yel'tsin to implement radical economic reforms, labelled "shock therapy", aimed at ensuring a rapid transition from a centrally planned to a free market economy. However, Gaidar's team eventually lost control over the economic strategy – partly due to the fact that radical reforms did not receive wide public support and partly as a result of Yel'tsin's attempts to maintain a balance between different power groups, which implied accepting certain compromises. This led to Yegor Gaidar's resignation from the government in 1994 and shortly thereafter, his bloc was transformed into the party Democratic Choice of Russia (DVR). Poor electoral performance of Gaidar's party in 1995 encouraged them to seek new alliances and by the following election a new electoral bloc was formed – the Union of Right Forces (SPS, later transformed into a party), which united a number of experienced politicians with governmental experience, including Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov.

Yabloko emerged from the electoral coalition between politicians Grigory Yavlinsky, Yuri Boldyrev and Vladimir Lukin, formed prior to the 1993 State Duma election, and by 2001 developed into a social-democratic political party. Grigory Yavlinsky, despite not being chairman at the time of the coalition's establishment, became the long-standing leader of Yabloko. In 1990, when Grigory Yavlinsky was Deputy Prime Minister, he gathered his own team of economists and presented an alternative to Gaidar's reform plan (Hale 2004). However, Gaidar was selected by Yel'tsin, which put Yavlinsky in opposition to both the President and Gaidar's party.

The unwillingness of party leaders to establish a broad liberal-democratic coalition is often attributed to their political ambitions and inter-personal rivalry between the leader of Yabloko Grigory Yavlinsky and the economic liberals, Anatoly Chubais and Yegor Gaidar in particular. For example, a party merger would have forced Grigory Yavlinsky to give up his status as the sole party leader. Presidential ambitions created an additional barrier to cooperation: heading the party list during a parliamentary election provided significant benefits for a future presidential candidate (Gel'man 1999; White 2006).

The factor of leadership ambitions tends to play a crucial role in less institutionalised party systems, such as the Russian, due to the central role of personalities in parties' decision-making and a lack of internal checks and balances. However, there were other important factors that prevented the formation of a broad reformist coalition, including the differences in parties' ideological positions that determined their different electoral strategies, as well as their contrasting attitudes towards the regime.

2.4.1 The role of ideological differences

The economic liberal bloc and Yabloko had different approaches to market reform: the former advocated for minimal state intervention, whereas the latter offered a more socially-oriented economic programme (White 2005, p. 464; 2006). The arguments of Yabloko politicians were similar to those put forward earlier by SDPR members. One of the Yabloko leaders, Sergey Mitrokhin, called the economic proposals of SPS "19th century liberalism" (White 2006, p. 76), criticising their economic policy for its lack of social guarantees, which could put a large proportion of the Russian population below the poverty line and result in a loss of public support. Yabloko's programme offered a more humane approach to market transition, which involved support for vulnerable groups and a greater state responsibility, as well as the use of more democratic means of reform implementation (Hale 2004). SPS members presented alternative arguments: in their view, the only way out of the crisis was through rapid economic growth, which required the expansion of business freedoms and protection of property rights.

These ideological positions determined core electorates of the two parties, who shared many characteristics: both Yabloko and SPS voters were relatively young, educated people, primarily those living in large cities; both groups supported the democratic transition (Brudny 2001; Hale 2004; White 2006). At the same time, there were some significant differences in their socioeconomic status: the electoral base of SPS included people from the business sector, who were able to benefit from Yel'tsin's economic policies to a much greater degree than Yabloko voters, most of whom belonged to the academic sphere. The former category was interested in radical economic liberalisation, wider business opportunities and lower taxes, whereas the latter category favoured milder economic reforms that would provide at least basic social guarantees and ensure a smooth democratic transition.

In a well-established democratic system, it would be rational for parties with such different ideological platforms and distinct social bases of support to compete against each other. However, the weakness of liberal-democratic parties in Russia and the threat

of them failing to overcome the parliamentary entry threshold, urged parties to consider potential electoral cooperation. Economic liberals were generally more open to coalition-formation, whereas Yabloko adopted a policy of non-engagement in alliances, with the exception of tactical cooperation with individual politicians and agreements regarding specific majoritarian districts. Grigory Yavlinsky often justified his reluctance to unite with the economic liberal bloc by the potential loss of the loyal Yabloko electorate. As he explained, a unification would result in Yabloko supporters voting "against all" and therefore, reducing the overall share of the democratic vote (White 2006). Yabloko's strategy was to distance themselves from the legacy of failed economic reforms and preserve their image as an uncompromising opposition party. For example, Yabloko rejected Gaidar's proposal to merge their parties in 1995, explaining this decision by the unwillingness to be associated with the economic policy that created "phony capitalism" and led to the economic collapse, poverty and criminalisation (Hale 2004, p. 999).

Moreover, economic policy was not the only ideological distinction that divided the two political forces. Contrasting positions of Yabloko and SPS on the military actions in Chechnya – one of the central issues during the 1999 election campaign – became an addition barrier to cooperation (Yavlinsky 1999). The decision of the then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to launch a military operation, following the Chechen invasion into the neighbouring Republic of Dagestan and a series of apartment block bombings, was severely criticised by Grigory Yavlinsky, while SPS leaders expressed support for the government's actions. Anatoly Chubais described the military campaign as an inevitable response to the terrorist attacks and an attempt to prevent further violence against civilian population. Grigory Yavlisky, by contrast, argued that what started as necessary actions to combat terrorism turned into a large-scale invasion by federal troops deep into the territory of Chechnya, turning the anti-terrorist operation into a full-blown war against the Chechen republic. He urged the government to consider negotiations with some of the separatist leaders in order to achieve a more peaceful conflict resolution and minimise casualties (Yabloko 2003). However, Yabloko's principled position in support of human rights and against further development of armed conflict did not bring the party electoral success in the 1999 State Duma election, despite its rising popularity at the start of the election campaign – opinion polls predicted over 10% of the party list vote, compared to the received 5.9% (Hale 2004; Brudny 2001). The primary reason behind the disappointing electoral outcome was not a lack of support for Yabloko's anti-war rhetoric but rather, disagreement within the party that gave rise to a widespread critique regarding the inconsistency of its position on the conflict in Chechnya.

In an attempt to overcome its image as a stand-alone "do nothing" party, Yabloko decided to depart from its traditional electoral strategy and formed an alliance with the former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin and other politicians associated with his government, all of whom were nominated by Yabloko (Hale 2004, p. 1002; White 2006). Initially, the alliance improved Yabloko's popularity; however, the inability of Grigory Yavlinsky and Sergei Stepashin to agree on the party's official position on the conflict in Chechnya undermined the party's campaign efforts. This topic was not among Yabloko's strong points, whose political agenda generally focused on the issue of failed economic reforms and corruption within the government. Sergei Stepashin, as former Minister of Internal Affairs, was more prepared to speak about the armed conflict and its resolution (Hale 2004). Unfortunately for Yabloko, his position on this issue differed from that of Yavlinsky: Stepashin assessed Putin's actions as an adequate response and expressed doubts regarding the possibility of negotiations before the terrorist threat was eliminated (Stepashin 1999). Yabloko was attempting to strike a balance between following its core principles and preserving a potentially vote-winning alliance – a compromise, which ultimately turned against the party at the polls. The way Yabloko's election campaign was managed also contributed to the disappointing electoral outcome: Sergei Stepashin was largely excluded from campaign decision-making, which led to uncoordinated public statements and highlighted the demonstrative nature of the union that served primarily to display Yabloko's ability to engage in coalitions, rather than ensure mutually beneficial cooperation between the politicians (Hale 2004, p. 1010). In addition, the party's campaign strategy was criticised by some Yabloko members for its exclusive focus on the promotion of Grigory Yavlinsky, with regional advertisements showing local Yabloko politicians in the shadow of the party leader. Local leaders expressed concerns regarding the excessive centralisation of campaign management and concentration of resources in the central office with insufficient support allocated to regional campaigns.

Centralised campaign strategies were not unique to Yabloko, but a common characteristic of liberal-democratic parties. This common pattern can partly be explained by their insufficient resources and partly by the parties' focus on presidential races and the consequent decision to prioritise the promotion of their party leaders. This approach was enabled by the presence of the proportional representation component in the electoral system, which allowed parties to concentrate their efforts on overcoming the party list threshold, instead of investing resources in a large number of regional campaigns in majoritarian districts. Neither Yabloko nor SPS aimed to become mass organisations: the parties never put emphasis on mass membership recruitment or the strengthening of their

regional networks (White 2011, p. 669). However, Yabloko has always been particularly well-known for its restrictive membership requirements. This issue led to intra-party debates in 1996-1999 regarding the need to revise Yabloko's internal policies and its ideological positioning, with two contrasting approaches emerging within the party (Hale 2004).

One group of party members, led by economist Ivan Grachev, proposed to focus on attracting the newly established middle class of entrepreneurs: connections within the business community could potentially bring more resources into the party, allowing Yabloko to develop its organisational structure and the network of regional units (Hale 2004, p. 1003). Proponents of this approach suggested to abandon excessive ideological checks for new party members in order to simplify the membership recruitment process and make participation in party activities more accessible. Moreover, Ivan Grachev advised to soften their rhetoric with regard to Yel'tsin's economic reforms: as he argued, this move would facilitate the recruitment of more experienced politicians and experts, contributing to the party's higher professionalisation. In his view, the party's uncompromising ideological stance and the policy of political isolation threatened to keep Yabloko as a permanently niche party for intellectuals with no governing experience.

This pragmatic approach did not receive the support of Yabloko's leader Grigory Yavlinsky, who made a decision in favour of an alternative, much more uncompromising strategy, proposed by former dissident Vyacheslav Igrunov. Igrunov opposed any changes with regard to the Yabloko's preferred support base, arguing that the "former Soviet middle class" was a more reliable electorate, compared to the entrepreneurial class, who were less loyal and could easily switch to another party in the future (Hale 2004, p. 1004). According to his view, party membership had to be based on loyalty, activism and ideological compliance, which required strict selection procedures. According to the proposed amendments, prospective members required recommendations from an existing Yabloko member, they had to express commitment to the party's ideological principles and complete a probationary period, during which the degree of their loyalty and participation could be assessed. These requirements were meant to keep the Yabloko organisation active and ideologically homogeneous, and deter any ideologically distant candidates from using the party as a platform for nomination. Implementation of these new policies developed into a large-scale campaign aimed at enforcing ideological compliance within the party ("Igrunov's purity campaign", p. 1003), which resulted in the removal of many regional leaders and the dissolution of 11 regional Yabloko branches. The declared justification for these urgent extreme measures was related to the

protection of certain party branches from being captured by the authoritarian governors. However, the methods that were used to maintain control over regional organisations were far from democratic: the process was highly centralised, the absence of formal procedures or well-defined criteria for the evaluation of ideological compliance left room for personalistic decisions and put into question the real motives behind the campaign. As a result of this restructuring, regional Yabloko organisations lost a great degree of their autonomy, including their control over the admission of new members and other powers, which were transferred to the central party office.

Yabloko's decision to prioritise ideological compliance over a more pragmatic approach had additional downsides: the party was frequently criticised for nominating the most loyal candidates, instead of those with a higher recognition and popularity if their views deviated from the official party line, which came at the expense of improving Yabloko's electoral performance (Hale 2004). Moreover, these policies were incompatible with establishing inter-party alliances, which required accepting certain ideological and policy compromises. This explains the failure of the union between Yabloko and Sergei Stepashin, as well as the inability to form an electoral coalition with other parties. Although Yabloko and SPS achieved an agreement regarding the allocation of majoritarian districts in big cities during 1999 and 2003 elections, this was an isolated tactical move, rather than an attempt to establish strategic partnership: for the most part, parties continued to compete and criticise each other (White 2006). In addition to the ideological incompatibilities, there was another fundamental difference that divided the two political forces, related to their contrasting relationships with the government.

2.4.2 Attitudes towards the regime

Vladimir Gel'man (1999) outlines a number of challenging dilemmas faced by the democratic parties during the first decade after *perestroika*. Political parties were often forced to choose between supporting the imperfect government line and confronting the risk of a communist victory with a potential return of the communist regime (Gel'man 1999, p. 153). This referred, for example, to the 1993 constitutional crisis and the presidential election in 1996, when some opposition forces decided in favour of "the lesser evil" and supported the reformist President, despite their disagreements, while others consistently opposed Boris Yel'tsin, prioritising their democratic principles.

Another dilemma was related to the choice of political allies and the idea of forming a negative consensus coalition (Gel'man 1999, p. 155). There were two possible coalition strategies: cooperation with ideologically distant parties on the basis of their mutual

opposition to Yel'tsin's regime (such as the Communist Party) or an alliance with more ideologically compatible forces that were affiliated with the government. Rejection of either strategies could lead to a party's political isolation and the consequent poor electoral outcomes.

Some parties also had to confront the decision regarding whether or not to accept governing positions offered to them, which implied sharing responsibility with the government and possible integration into the regime (Gel'man 1999, p. 156). On the one hand, accepting the offer provided an opportunity to gain governing experience and contribute to the implementation of important policies. On the other hand, internal discipline within the executive branch often constrained politicians and prevented them from achieving any significant results. Therefore, such offers became a powerful tool in the hands of the ruling elite that could both divide the opposition and discredit its efforts.

Russian liberal-democratic parties adopted different approaches in response to these dilemmas. Throughout Yel'tsin's presidencies Yabloko remained in opposition to the government, whereas the economic liberal bloc, which started as a governmental force, expressed support for some of Yel'tsin's policies and endorsed his successor Vladimir Putin during the 2000 presidential election.

Yabloko's electoral strategy was centred around its anti-regime attitude and severe critique of Yel'tsin's politics, from the failed economic reforms to corruption within the governing bodies (White 2006). Yabloko politicians actively distanced themselves from any associations with unpopular economic policies and their negative consequences – they often highlighted the fact that Yabloko, unlike SPS, had no people among its members, who were responsible for the poor political and economic situation in Russia (White 2005, p. 468). Grigory Yavlinsky criticised the loyalty of SPS politicians to Yel'tsin, which, in his view, came at the expense of following key democratic principles (White 2006, p. 78). Yabloko leaders emphasised their greater independence and the policy of non-cooperation with government officials, presenting Yabloko as the party of "true democrats" and a more favourable alternative to the existing regime (White 2005, p. 468).

Gaidar's party and later SPS were generally classified as semi-opposition: they were much less critical of the government and used anti-communist rhetoric during their campaigns, rather than anti-Yel'tsin (White 2006; Gel'man 2008, p. 925). Their party leaders emphasised the need to cooperate with government officials in order to successfully implement reforms and achieve democratic changes. They presented themselves as a "constructive opposition" and often portrayed their rivals as the party of

regime critics incapable of getting things done (Shevtsova 2005, p. 51; White 2005, p. 468; Hale 2004). In 1999-2000 when Vladimir Putin came to power first as the Prime Minister and later as the President, SPS, similarly, expressed support for his crucial political decisions and the overall political direction.

However, during Putin's first term parties' roles changed (Gel'man 2005, p. 240; White 2006). After Yabloko's poor electoral results in both parliamentary (1999) and presidential (2000) elections, the party decided to switch from principal to semi-opposition in an attempt to improve its electoral prospects by expressing loyalty to the popular President. For example, Yabloko supported Putin's response to the hostage crisis at the Moscow Dubrovka theatre in 2002, whereas SPS members criticised government's actions and proposed to form a parliamentary commission to conduct a thorough investigation. This change was partly a result of Putin's effective divide-and-rule tactics, who signalled support for SPS in 1999 and for Yabloko – in 2003, at the same time successfully dividing SPS by offering posts to some of its members (White 2011, p. 672; Gel'man 2005, p. 237). The role of a semi-opposition party did not bring Yabloko the desired popular support: the party failed to overcome the parliamentary threshold in 2003. As the regime was becoming increasingly undemocratic, Yabloko returned to the disloyal opposition camp. SPS was divided and eventually lost its status as an independent party: some of its leaders, who were loyal to Putin, accepted the positions offered to them (such as Sergei Kiriyenko and Nikita Belykh), while Putin's critics (such as Boris Nemtsov) left the party and later established new political entities, including the movement Solidarity and political party Parnas.

2.5 Trends within the opposition movement in the 2000s and later

After the 2003 and 2007 electoral victories, Putin's party United Russia strengthened its status as the dominant party, aided by widespread electoral manipulation and fraud (Gel'man 2008). Yabloko and SPS failed to clear the party list threshold in both legislative elections. By the time of the 2008 presidential election, all independent opposition parties and their leaders had been excluded from systemic politics. However, despite their mutual opposition to Putin's regime, non-systemic opposition forces struggled to establish a broad electoral coalition. Yabloko maintained its strategy of non-engagement in formal opposition alliances and only cooperated with opposition politicians on an individual basis.

In the second part of the 2000s numerous opposition movements were formed, including the United Civic Front (established in 2005 by a well-known critic of Putin's

regime Garry Kasparov), The Other Russia (established in 2006 by the leader of the National Bolshevik Party Eduard Limonov, Garry Kasparov and former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov), the Russian People's Democratic Union (established in 2006 by Mikhail Kasyanov) and the youth movement Oborona (established in 2005 by the then leader of Yabloko's youth wing Ilya Yashin and others). In 2008, an attempt was made to unite diverse opposition leaders and their supporters into the movement Solidarity, which was joined by former SPS leaders Boris Nemtsov and Nikita Belykh, Garry Kasparov, Ilya Yashin, other politicians and human rights activists, such as Lev Ponomaryov. In 2009, the initiative Strategy-31 was launched by some opposition members, who urged Russian citizens to join civic protests in the centre of Moscow in support of the right to peaceful assembly enshrined in the Russian Constitution, article 31. However, these movements failed to gather any significant public support and recruit a sufficient number of members and volunteers to sustain effective political activity. The most notable protest actions organised by them in the 2000s only gathered a few thousand participants across Russia.

In part, this was a result of the prolonged suppression of political freedoms, which continued during Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012). Medvedev's perceived liberalisation was primarily reflected in the liberal rhetoric of his presidential speeches, his attempted but largely unsuccessful reforms (Gel'man and Starodubtsev 2016) and certain civil liberties (internet and some media freedoms). At the same time, Medvedev's term did not bring any widening of political rights. For example, restrictive barriers for new party registration were only lowered insignificantly: parties had to recruit a minimum of 45 thousand members (later 40, compared to 50 during the earlier Putin's term) in order to qualify for registration. Moreover, political party Parnas was denied registration despite fulfilling this legal requirement. The requirement to gather 2 million signatures in order to be registered as a non-partisan presidential candidate remained in place until after the 2012 presidential election. In addition, presidential and parliamentary terms were lengthened during Medvedev's presidency, which was widely perceived as an undemocratic move. The freedom of assembly was continuously violated, with the authorities refusing to issue permissions for street political gatherings under the pretext of other events being held at the requested locations. Unsanctioned rallies were frequently dispersed and some of their organisers were subjected to arbitrary detentions and administrative arrests.

However, the weakness of the opposition movement in Russia before the wave of protests against electoral fraud in 2011-2012 could also be partly attributed to its

fragmentation – a lack of unity around joint political activities or projects. For example, Mikhail Kasyanov's presidential campaign of 2007-2008 did not become a unifying event for the democratic movement (Zabrodov 2008). Boris Nemtsov withdrew his candidacy, urging other opposition members to support a single presidential candidate, but at the same time, advised Kasyanov to exit the race if the election campaign turned out to be undemocratic and uncompetitive (implying candidates' unequal access to media and the use of administrative resource by United Russia). Other opposition leaders (including Garry Kasparov) did not support Kasyanov due to previous conflicts and Yabloko endorsed an alternative candidate (Nekhezin 2007; Zabrodov 2008).

A coalition of opposition forces emerged in 2010-2011 that aimed to register the opposition party Parnas; however, prior to the 2011 State Duma election opposition leaders experienced divisions once again due to disagreements regarding the best campaign strategy to undermine the popularity of United Russia (Gel'man 2013, p. 6).

The importance of broad anti-regime coalitions is demonstrated by the case of Russian post-election protests in December 2011-June 2012, which were supported by the majority of opposition forces (including some systemic parties) and collectively organised. While failing to achieve the desired regime change, the protest wave proved to be the most consequential opposition event in Putin's Russia to date – a number of significant concessions were made, such as the relaxation of party registration rules, the return of gubernatorial elections and arguably, the temporary lifting of the ban on genuine political competition, which allowed Alexey Navalny to participate in the Moscow mayoral election.

There were a number of factors that triggered anti-regime sentiment at the time, including the unfortunate timing of Medvedev-Putin "job swap" announcement, the powerful opposition's anti-United Russia campaign and widespread electoral manipulation during the 2011 parliamentary election (Gel'man 2013). A fully proportional representation system (with all Duma seats allocated through closed party lists) that had previously benefitted United Russia, contributed to the opposition's success in 2011: it allowed the newly emerged opposition leader Alexey Navalny to promote his highly successful formula "Vote for any party but United Russia", which would have been less effective in a mixed electoral system. This strategy aimed to overcome opposition fragmentation by means of a negative consensus; while this option was opposed by other opposition leaders, it received wide support among voters and forced United Russia to resort to mass ballot-stuffing and vote-counting fraud. This coincided with the growth of the Russian election observation movement and the increasing

popularity of social media, which helped to identify and document cases of electoral fraud, and spread the evidence rapidly and widely, along with other anti-United Russia campaign materials. However, the most crucial element of success was the broadness of the opposition coalition that emerged in response to the fraudulent election. A wide range of political forces with diverse ideological positions joined the protest, including not only uncompromising anti-regime parties but also those more loyal to the regime.

The protest wave became transformational for the Russian democratic movement: it attracted many new people into the opposition, gave rise to new non-systemic political parties and facilitated the emergence of a new generation of opposition politicians. At the same time, attempts to establish a formal coalition were largely unsuccessful: the Opposition Coordination Council (2012-2013) and the Democratic Coalition (2015-2016) proved to be short-lived. Yabloko refused to participate in these united projects and competed against Parnas in the 2016 parliamentary election. Moreover, the idea of a broad coalition of anti-regime forces, highly popular among opposition members after the mass protests, gradually lost the support of both leaders and activists. Further chapters explain this change by exploring the main causes of division within the non-systemic opposition movement in 2011-2019.

2.6 Conclusion

Despite numerous institutional incentives for party consolidation, introduced throughout the 1990s (including the proportional representation component of the party system, multiple electoral participation thresholds, a parliamentary entry threshold and opportunity to unite in electoral blocs), the Russian party system remained highly fragmented. In a system, where the president played a central role in government formation, presidential ambitions of party leaders often outweighed legislative incentives for inter-party cooperation, particularly considering the leader-centric nature of Russian parties. Party leaders were unwilling to face internal competition for the presidential nomination, which would have been inevitable in the case of a party merger. However, there were additional barriers to cooperation between Russian parties, which changed throughout the years.

Early political parties that emerged during the *perestroika* period, such as RPR and SDPR, failed to unite in a coalition and in addition, experienced internal divisions. Their members were unwilling to adopt a degree of political pragmatism that would help them accomplish important political tasks and achieve their political goals. Instead, they engaged in lengthy internal discussions on overly abstract topics that tended to divide

members and hindered the organisation of collective partisan activities or engagement in alliances that would improve parties' electoral prospects. The desire to preserve the openness of partisan structures also interfered with their productivity and prevented their professionalisation and development.

Later reformist political forces, such as the economic liberal bloc (Russia's Choice, Democratic Choice of Russia, SPS) and Yabloko more closely resembled professionalised parties. However, they also failed to unite in a coalition, which split the liberal-democratic vote and allowed the Communist Party and later Putin's United Russia to capitalise on their divisions. Yabloko politicians rejected coalition proposals from the economic liberals in an attempt to distance themselves from failed and unpopular economic reforms. They highlighted ideological differences between the parties, criticising Gaidar's policy of radical economic liberalisation and arguing in favour of milder reforms and greater social protection. They also emphasised their consistent opposition to Yel'tsin's governments, in contrast to the economic liberal bloc.

Russian opposition forces in the 2010s faced some of the same difficulties and dilemmas as the democratic parties during the earlier period. For example, the Opposition Coordination Council fell victim to the "syndrome of ineffectiveness", described by M. S. Fish (1995), when its members struggled to organise any effective political activities due to lengthy arguments over minor procedural issues. A lack of productive activity led to many members leaving the Council, which eventually resulted in its dissolution.

Similar to the Russian parties in the 1990s, new political forces that were formed in 2011-2013 struggled to maintain a balance between openness and professionalisation. Some of them, like the 5th of December Party, prioritised the principle of openness and decentralisation, which came at the expense of developing an effective organisational structure and recruiting professional managers. By contrast, the Anti-Corruption Foundation became the most professional and highly effective political force; however, it was often criticised by opposition activists for its closed nature and overly centralised decision-making. There are also some similarities between the aforementioned electoral strategies and those of contemporary opposition parties: Parnas, which is generally viewed as a successor to SPS, was more open to unions, compared to Yabloko, who consistently rejected merger and coalition proposals.

At the same time, some disagreements that divided reformist parties earlier became secondary. The nature of the ideological debate changed: the discussion shifted from the economic matters towards the social dimension – in the first part of the 2010s opposition members disagreed about the inclusion of nationalist forces in the liberal-democratic

movement. Despite this disagreement, most parties accepted members with diverse ideological positions and the general anti-regime agenda became more important than specific policy proposals. Only Yabloko continued to justify their reluctance to cooperate with other parties by the ideological incompatibilities, but opposition activists found this justification less convincing within the context of an increasingly repressive political environment and the need to defend basic political freedoms and human rights.

Chapter 3. Case Study: Divisions Within a Political Party – Parnas, 2011 and 2014

3.1 Introduction

Political party Parnas (short for People's Freedom Party and later renamed RPR-Parnas) was founded in 2010-2011 by several opposition forces, who aspired to build a mass opposition party capable of uniting diverse opposition members and offering a platform for the nomination of anti-regime politicians. At the time of its establishment, the party successfully recruited a sufficient number of members to qualify for registration. However, it did not become the leading and unifying force within the opposition and largely failed to attract new activists that joined the democratic movement during the wave of mass protests in 2011-2012. Moreover, Parnas experienced several splits that resulted in the loss of a large proportion of its initial membership base and significantly weakened the party. Based on an analysis of various open sources, including interviews with Parnas leaders, their statements on social media and press reports, this chapter outlines the primary causes of division within the party that led to its first and second splits in 2011 and 2014 respectively.

The first case examines the debate regarding the effectiveness of electoral participation within an undemocratic environment that tended to divide opposition members at the time, along with other factors that contributed to the split, including the presidential ambitions of party leaders and a lack of internal democratic mechanisms that could have assisted with conflict-resolution.

The debate on the effectiveness of various electoral strategies within the opposition evolved throughout the years. During Yel'tsin's presidencies opposition parties disagreed on the choice between anti-communist (SPS) and anti-government (Yabloko) agendas. During Putin's and Medvedev's presidencies, as the regime became more authoritarian and most opposition forces were excluded from systemic politics, anti-regime politicians disagreed regarding the potential effectiveness of election participation attempts, considering the fraudulent electoral process in Russia. Later, as the boycotting option failed to attract sufficient support within the opposition community and among the general public, debates on electoral strategies continued in other forms: for example, the choice between supporting weaker democratic politicians or ideologically-distant anti-regime candidates with stronger electoral prospects often divided opposition members.

Apart from the strategy-related disagreements, the first case of Parnas, analysed in this chapter, highlights an additional source of division between party members – a lack of democratic mechanisms within the party that could facilitate fair internal competition

for candidate nomination, in particular during the presidential elections. The absence of clear rules regarding candidate nomination led to a conflict within the party and the exit of one party leader Vladimir Milov, who had aimed to become a presidential candidate. He left Parnas along with many of his supporters and established an independent political party DemVybor. This issue was not unique to Parnas – the inability of parties to manage leaders' presidential ambitions through internal democratic mechanisms is a common problem within the opposition. Politicians, aspiring to become presidential nominees, tend to establish independent political parties if they are not endorsed by the members of existing parties. As a result, the majority of opposition parties have no more than one leader with presidential ambitions. This leads to the emergence of a larger number of parties than could be justified by ideological differences. Despite attempts to introduce certain democratic mechanisms within parties (examples include primaries and online voting systems for party members), ordinary party members are often excluded from decision-making when decisions affect the interests of federal-level leaders.

The second case of Parnas explores the reasons behind the conflict between the party faction led by Vladimir Ryzhkov and the two other factions led by Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov. These include contrasting attitudes of party leaders towards the nomination of Alexey Navalny by RPR-Parnas during the 2013 Moscow mayoral election, disagreements regarding the party's political strategy and public image, as well as the balance of power between different parts of the party and their respective co-chairs. This case highlights the unique role of Alexey Navalny as both a divisive and a unifying figure within the Russian opposition: he tended to unite activists with diverse party affiliations but triggered divisions between parties at the federal level. The second split within Parnas also demonstrates the conflict between the uncompromising wing of the Russian opposition and opposition members willing to accept limited cooperation with the regime in order to achieve certain objectives. In addition, it illustrates the problem of party license ownership that frequently divided opposition members, who disagreed on whether party registration was the achievement of specific politicians, a party or opposition community as a whole. Vladimir Ryzhkov and his allies invested significant personal resources in acquiring Parnas' party registration and expected their faction to enjoy certain privileges within the party, whereas leaders of other factions argued in favour of the principle of equality. A similar issue arose later, when several opposition parties attempted to build a democratic coalition in 2015-2016 – this case is analysed in chapter 4. Parnas, as a registered party offering other coalition members a platform for the nomination of their candidates, insisted on its privileged position within the coalition,

while other coalition members advocated for equality of all participating parties, considering politically motivated nature of the party registration process.

3.2 The establishment of Parnas and strategic disagreements

Parnas emerged in 2010-2011 from the alliance of four opposition forces: unregistered party RPR (Republican Party of Russia) and political movements DemVybor (Democratic Choice), Solidarity (*Solidarnost'*) and RNDS (Russian People's Democratic Union) (Parnasparty.ru; appendix 3.1). RPR was one of the oldest Russian parties that was founded during the *perestroika* period in 1990, its official registration was revoked in 2007 and later restored after the European Court of Human Rights' ruling. Movements DemVybor, Solidarity and RNDS were established in the second part of the 2000s with a view to uniting people opposed to Putin's regime. The four leaders of the aforementioned political forces became co-chairs of the newly formed party, all of them were relatively experienced politicians with a political background as elected or appointed officials during Yel'tsin's and early Putin's presidencies: Mikhail Kasyanov, the leader of RNDS, was Prime Minister during Putin's first term, Vladimir Milov, the founder of DemVybor, briefly served as Deputy Minister of Energy in 2002, Boris Nemtsov, the leader of Solidarity, was governor of the Nizhniy Novgorod oblast in 1991-1997 and Vladimir Ryzhkov, the chairman of RPR – the First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma in 1997-1999 (TASS encyclopedia 1 and 2; Milov.org; Ekho Moskvy: contributors, Vladimir Ryzhkov).

The main idea behind the party establishment was to create a broad coalition of democratically-oriented opposition forces with a view to participating in the upcoming 2011 parliamentary election (Vinogradov 2010). Yabloko was not considered as a potential platform for unification due to its well-established reputation as a stand-alone party, unwilling to engage in any formal opposition alliances. Moreover, Yabloko was perceived as a semi-systemic party by many opposition members at the time – a consequence of its non-participation in many opposition activities and discussions, whereas Parnas leaders promoted their party as an uncompromising alternative to the systemic opposition. Parnas was presented as a liberal-democratic party, campaigning for the European values and European path of development, political and economic liberalisation (Parnasparty.ru). Parnas – a successor to RPR, Democratic Choice of Russia and SPS – was a more economically liberal party, compared to Yabloko, although it accepted opposition activists with diverse political views in the absence of strict ideological checks.

The establishment of a new political party that aimed to unite anti-regime forces generated much interest within the opposition community. However, Parnas' plan to nominate a party list during the 2011 State Duma election was undermined by their inability to acquire a formal party license: despite fulfilling restrictive membership requirements, the party was denied registration by the Ministry of Justice (Maloveryan 2011). The intra-party debate regarding an appropriate strategy for the upcoming electoral cycle in the absence of a party registration led to internal divisions, resulting in one of the party leaders, Vladimir Milov, leaving the union, along with his political force DemVybor (Nemtsov 2011g; Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011; Saidov 2011; Milov 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). Disagreements between Parnas members regarding the electoral strategy was reflective of a broader debate within the opposition community on the feasibility of electoral participation, considering the fraudulent nature of the electoral process. The outcome of this debate was a gradual shift from 'exit' to 'participation' strategies in the early 2010s.

In the late 2000s, after the exclusion of anti-regime parties from systemic politics (including the dissolution of SPS and the exclusion of Mikhail Kasyanov from the 2008 presidential race), most independent opposition forces adopted a non-participatory approach with regard to the electoral process. Opposition members argued about the futility of participation attempts within the context of widespread electoral fraud and manipulation by the ruling party and instead, preferred to focus their efforts on protest actions, internal opposition events and boycott campaigns against unfair elections at various levels. Denial of party registration to Parnas strengthened the views of many opposition leaders regarding the boycotting or ballot-spoiling as the only viable electoral strategy in an undemocratic political environment.

During the period leading to the 2011 parliamentary election some opposition politicians challenged the status quo, proposing alternative forms of political participation that implied a more active role for opposition members in the electoral process. The debate on electoral participation initially triggered divisions within the opposition, including the split within Parnas in 2011 and later disagreements between members of the Opposition Coordination Council. However, as participation strategies (attempts to participate in elections, protest voting campaigns) demonstrated greater effectiveness, public opinion was swayed in their favour, despite the fact that elections had not become

any fairer. After Parnas acquired official registration through the European Court ruling[2], its leaders changed their attitudes towards electoral participation: for example, Parnas nominated Alexey Navalny for the 2013 Moscow mayoral election and formed an electoral coalition with other parties in 2015-2016. Unregistered parties also tended to take part in elections by supporting their candidates, who ran as independents or negotiated their nomination with one of the registered parties. Moreover, opposition leaders began to invest resources in regional and municipal-level campaigns, in addition to federal-level elections.

At the same time, the debate on the effectiveness of various electoral strategies continued in other forms. For example, prior to the 2019 Moscow City Duma election, Alexey Navalny presented a new protest voting strategy titled "smart voting", which implied voting for candidates most likely to defeat United Russia nominees in their majoritarian districts, regardless of their ideological platforms or party affiliation (Navalny 2019b; Meduza 2019a; 2019b). This approach was criticised by some opposition members, who argued that Alexey Navalny's proposal had a negative impact on the election campaigns of opposition candidates, who did not appear on the "smart voting" list, compiled by Navalny's team (Katz 2020). Instead, they urged opposition members to concentrate their efforts on supporting their allies in a small number of districts.

The question of endorsing weaker opposition candidates when the strongest were excluded from the race, presented another common topic of debate within the opposition. Examples include the 2018 presidential election, when the most popular opposition candidate Alexey Navalny was denied registration for the election after a year-long presidential campaign, while other opposition politicians, Kseniya Sobchak and Grigory Yavlinsky, were approved as presidential candidates (Navalny 2017a; 2017b). Navalny's team decided to launch a boycott campaign, aiming to lower the voter turnout, and organise street protest actions against the unfair election, while other opposition members argued in favour of protest voting as a more effective strategy (Ekho Moskvy 2018).

3.3 Electoral strategy during the 2011 parliamentary election

Discussions regarding the anti-regime campaign and possible electoral strategies started within the opposition well in advance of the 2011 parliamentary election and

[2] In 2012 the European Court of Human Rights recognised the withdrawal of RPR's party license (2007) as unlawful, which allowed RPR-Parnas to obtain party registration.

before the founding of Parnas. Opposition politicians expressed contrasting opinions regarding the effectiveness of street protests, the need to establish a new political party with a view to participating in future elections and potential cooperation with the existing parties (Tsybulsky 2010). Representatives of DemVybor argued about the futility of frequent protest actions that gathered a small number of participants, which was a common opposition activity at the time, and urged opposition members to focus on electoral participation and attempts to register an independent party, despite the high probability of a negative outcome (Milov 2010a; 2010b). Vladimir Milov noted that their statements regarding the illegitimacy of Russian elections required empirical evidence that could only be obtained through participation attempts (Milov 2010a). Some Solidarity members, including Ilya Yashin, supported efforts to organise mass protest actions in order to demonstrate their political significance and force the regime to make concessions (Tsybulsky 2010). Other opposition leaders, including Alexey Navalny, proposed to focus their efforts on the anti-regime campaign aiming to discredit the party of power, United Russia, instead of investing resources in party registration attempts. Potential negotiations with Yabloko were also discussed among the possible options, however, this strategy was rejected by most opposition members due to the failure of past negotiation attempts and concerns regarding its semi-systemic status (Ryzhkov 2010; Milov 2010a; Tsybulsky 2010). The debate on electoral participation continued after Parnas had been established and denied registration and further intensified during the period leading to the parliamentary election. Three competing electoral strategies emerged within the opposition: protest voting, offered by Alexey Navalny, a ballot-spoiling campaign, proposed by Boris Nemtsov, and a boycott of unfair elections, suggested by Garry Kasparov (Navalny et al. 2011; Tutrin and Lukyanov 2011; Nemtsov 2011d; 2011e).

Garry Kasparov's position was seen as the most uncompromising. Kasparov urged opposition members to distance themselves from fraudulent electoral procedures and exercise active non-involvement, including their de-registration from the official voter register (by writing a letter to the Electoral Commission requesting their exclusion) and the creation of an alternative voter database (Navalny et al. 2011). In his view, lowering voter turnout was the only responsible approach in an undemocratic political environment, as it could highlight the illegitimacy of the future parliament. In the longer-term, he proposed to work towards building a parallel political reality, based on direct democracy principles, enabled by the use of online voting tools – an idea, promoted by

the politician Leonid Volkov, which was later implemented in the form of the Opposition Coordination Council.

Similarly, Boris Nemtsov urged opposition members to avoid endorsing registered opposition parties, which he considered systemic, but proposed a different strategy – crossing out all parties on the ballot – as a more visible alternative to a boycott, capable of demonstrating public discontent (Nemtsov 2011d; Navalny et al. 2011). Otherwise, Nemtsov argued, their supporters would be indistinguishable from people, who abstained from voting for other reasons.

Alexey Navalny's approach, widely known as "vote for any party except for the party of crooks and thieves", subsequently became a crucial element of the opposition's campaign against United Russia that contributed to a decline in the party's approval rating, triggering widespread electoral fraud and mass protests in response. Alexey Navalny did not claim the original authorship of the protest vote concept, as he noted in one of his blog posts, but put much effort into popularising this strategy (Navalny 2011). He argued that opposing systemic parties was counter-productive, considering their mutual goal of undermining the dominant status of United Russia. Instead, he proposed to take steps towards the formation of a united opposition front against the ruling party.

A similar divide emerged within Parnas, with party members and leaders presenting arguments in favour of different electoral strategies (Saidov 2011; Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011; Milov 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). Although the party could not be registered for the parliamentary election, both boycotting and ballot-spoiling options were rejected by some party members as ineffective. The main advocate of active electoral participation within Parnas Vladimir Milov, along with the rest of DemVybor and some other Parnas members, including the then Yekaterinburg leader Leonid Volkov, argued that Alexey Navalny's proposal presented a unique opportunity for opposition forces to maximize the reputational damage to the party of power (Milov 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; Volkov 2011a; Ekho Moskvy 2011). In particular, this group opposed the adoption of a resolution prohibiting party members from voting for other opposition parties in the 2011 legislative election, which they criticised as both undemocratic and discouraging effective political action (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011; Saidov 2011; Volkov 2011b; 2011c).

The main objection to the ballot spoiling option was related to the failure of similar campaigns in the past. For example, the case of 2011 municipal election in Saint-Petersburg demonstrated the ineffectiveness of this approach – despite Boris Nemtsov's canvassing efforts, less than 1% of voters spoiled their ballots (Nemtsov 2011b; 2011c).

Opponents of the ballot-spoiling campaign within Parnas predicted a comparable outcome during the State Duma election and argued that a relatively small number of spoiled ballots could not have any significant impact on the electoral outcome, whereas a protest vote campaign was likely to undermine the status of United Russia as a majority party, given its already declining popularity (Ekho Moskvy 2011; DemVybor 2011a; 2011b). The boycott strategy received similar criticism: advocates of protest voting claimed that no level of voter abstention could have electoral consequences due to the absence of a minimum threshold for voter turnout.

Another critique was related to the overall political agenda of Parnas, which DemVybor members labelled as an outdated, dissident-style approach, inadequate within the contemporary political context (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). Vladimir Milov argued that the primary goals of a political party differed from those of a dissident movement: partisan politicians could not afford to abstain from participation in the ongoing political process, including elections. He noted that the majority of Russian citizens treated the upcoming event as an election, despite the opposition's effort to convince the public of its illegitimacy. This implied the limited potential of protest strategies, such as boycotting or ballot spoiling. DemVybor members attributed the ineffectiveness of previous opposition activities to their overreliance on a limited set of political tools, such as criticising the authorities within the narrow circle of the opposition community, issuing public statements or writing columns in opposition-friendly media, which they described as a passive agenda that resulted in their inability to reach a wider audience and expand their support base. They urged Parnas members to adopt a more pro-active approach in order to overcome their marginal status, instead of waiting for the electoral process to become free and fair.

Other Parnas leaders, Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov, presented a set of arguments against voting for systemic parties and in favour of a ballot-spoiling campaign as an equivalent of voting against all candidates ("none of the above") – the option that was no longer included in the ballots after the 2006 amendment to the electoral legislation. The primary objection to the protest vote strategy was the regime legitimisation argument, frequently used by opposition politicians during debates on the topic of electoral participation. Boris Nemtsov, for example, argued that the exclusion of independent political forces from elections signified a complete elimination of any genuine alternatives to the ruling party. Therefore, he concluded, Alexey Navalny's proposal encouraged their complicity in the fraudulent electoral process (Nemtsov 2011d; 2011e; 2011g; Navalny et al. 2011; Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). In his view, the

portrayal of the upcoming election as a referendum on public confidence in the current government was misleading because all parties on the ballot effectively equalled United Russia: they either had little chance of overcoming the 7% parliamentary entry threshold (Yabloko) or were "spoiler parties", coordinating their activities with the Presidential Administration. Vladimir Ryzhkov agreed that there was little justification or rationale for endorsing politicians, who were carefully pre-selected by the Kremlin. He noted that a redistribution of Duma seats in favour of systemic opposition was not associated with any democratic changes; on the contrary, voting for systemic parties provided additional legitimacy to the election, thus strengthening the regime (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). He also emphasised the active role of parliamentary opposition parties in the propaganda campaign against the independent opposition, which labelled Parnas leaders as former corrupt officials.

There were additional ideological arguments against the endorsement of systemic opposition: the two political parties that had the highest chance of overcoming the electoral threshold – the Communist Party and LDPR – were the furthest from Parnas ideologically. Boris Nemtsov predicted significant reputational damage as a consequence of endorsing Communist Party members, some of whom were Stalinists, or the nationalist and populist rhetoric of LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky, which would be incompatible with the liberal values of Parnas (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). In his view, a protest vote campaign was a viable strategy for an independent politician, such as Alexey Navalny, who could appeal to opposition members with diverse ideological views without compromising his political image. At the same time, he considered this strategy inappropriate for a political party with a specific ideology, programme and responsibilities towards its electorate. Critics of protest voting within Parnas presented the selection of electoral strategy as an ethical dilemma – the decision between being politically effective and following core political principles of the party. They viewed Alexey Navalny's tactics as a choice in favour of achieving a short-term objective and the approach of Parnas – as a longer-term strategy that prioritised their democratic values and preserved their status as an uncompromising anti-regime party.

An alternative position on the issue was expressed by Leonid Volkov, who represented Sverdlovsk regional branch at the party congress, where the decision regarding the electoral strategy was made (Volkov 2011b; 2011c; Parnas Ural 2011a; 2011b). He argued that the unity within the party was more important than the selection of the best strategy for the upcoming election. As he noted, regional Parnas members, who considered the establishment of a united opposition party a significant achievement,

were disappointed with internal divisions over a minor tactical disagreement (Volkov 2011b). From the perspective of regional activists, the party was becoming a hostage to inter-personal conflicts between a narrow group of Moscow-based leaders. Leonid Volkov, along with other members of his branch, emphasised the need to prioritise party development and further consolidation of the component forces through transition from a coalition-type relationship to functioning as a single party (Volkov 2011b; 2011c; Parnas Ural 2011b). In their view, the leaders of the four founding forces could no longer adequately represent the entire party because a significant number of members joined Parnas as a united party and had not been previously affiliated with any of the component political forces. This was partly a result of the recruitment drive after the unification: at the time political parties were obliged to have a minimum of 40 thousand members in order to qualify for registration – a larger number than the combined membership of the four merging forces. Therefore, Leonid Volkov concluded, the party's governing bodies could no longer be treated as a platform for negotiations between these forces. According to his observations, there was no overwhelming support for the ballot-spoiling strategy among the party members, despite it being promoted by the majority of party leaders: rather, different regional branches favoured different electoral strategies (Volkov 2011b). He suggested to adopt a democratic approach, allowing party members a freedom of choice between various strategies and avoiding unnecessary restrictions that could trigger divisions.

The outcome of this intra-party debate was the approval of the ballot-spoiling option as the official electoral strategy of Parnas during the 2011 parliamentary election, although individual party members were allowed to campaign for different anti-regime strategies (Nemtsov 2011g; Volkov 2011c). The decision was made through an open vote by delegates at the party congress, Vladimir Milov's proposal to hold voting by secret ballot was rejected (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). However, Alexey Navalny's protest voting proposal received much stronger support within the wider opposition community and among the general public, compared to the ballot-spoiling strategy of Parnas. This was reflected in the electoral outcome: despite widespread electoral fraud in favour of United Russia, systemic opposition parties collectively received close to 50% of the vote. Yabloko also benefitted from protest voting, gaining 3.4% of the vote – enough to qualify for the state party funding. In addition, the protest voting campaign, initiated by Alexey Navalny, facilitated the unity of opposition parties post-election, when both systemic and non-systemic opposition engaged in mass protests against unfair elections.

The selection of a less effective strategy by Parnas during the parliamentary election led to division within the party – the exit of DemVybor and some additional members, who were disappointed with the poor decision of party leaders and a lack of accountability for their mistakes post-election (Milov 2011d; Volkov 2012a). Appearing on the wrong side of the participation debate was among the primary reasons Parnas failed to become the leading opposition force during the 2011-2012 mass protests and could not retain its relatively large membership base, recruited in order to meet the legal requirements for party registration.

3.4 The question of participation in other elections and additional causes of division

The question of participation in other elections provoked similar debates within Parnas. DemVybor members supported participation in elections at all levels, including regional and local-level elections, arguing that any electoral activities that challenged the dominance of United Russia were beneficial for the opposition (Saidov 2011; Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). In their view, even relatively minor electoral successes would assist Parnas in overcoming their image as a do-nothing party that was of little political significance. Leonid Volkov, as a regional leader and deputy of Yekaterinburg City Duma, also encouraged opposition activists to run for local posts and launch localised political projects (Volkov 2010; 2012c). He argued about the importance of local-level politics in overcoming political apathy of the Russian population: various campaigns and initiatives could increase political awareness and involvement among citizens and contribute to the establishment of a stronger civil society in Russia.

Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov opposed this strategy: in their opinion, electoral victories of individual opposition politicians in the regions did not translate into the success of the opposition movement at the federal level (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). They argued that most independent politicians were unable to bring any positive change to their regions: they were forced to cooperate with the ruling party and were eventually fully integrated into the established political system.

The same divide occurred with regard to the 2012 presidential election. Nomination of a single presidential candidate, selected through intra-party primaries, was among the conditions of Parnas' merger agreement (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). Vladimir Milov put his candidacy forward but did not receive the support of other party leaders, who viewed him as a weak candidate and in addition, were reluctant to invest resources in the signature collection process – one of the legal requirements for candidate registration. Independent candidates, as well as those nominated by extra-parliamentary parties, had

to gather 2 million signatures in their support across many Russian regions in order to be registered for the presidential election. This task was costly and organisationally challenging due to severe time constraints and the high number of signature collectors needed to complete the process successfully. Moreover, as previous attempts had demonstrated, the submission of required signatures did not guarantee opposition candidates a positive outcome. For example, in 2008 Mikhail Kasyanov was excluded from the presidential race, despite submitting 2 million signatures in support of his candidacy. For this reason, in 2012 Mikhail Kasyanov was only willing to become a candidate if the signature collection requirement was abolished, which, as he admitted, was an unlikely scenario (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). Vladimir Ryzhkov and Boris Nemtsov supported this position and suggested to concentrate their efforts on the campaign against the restrictive entry barriers. They argued that the costs and risks of a presidential campaign outweighed the potential benefits, unless a stronger presidential candidate could be found outside of Parnas, willing to be nominated by the party. As Boris Nemtsov explained, a significant investment of resources in the presidential campaign was justified if their candidate had a potential to gain nationwide support – not only within the opposition community but among the general public. However, his previous attempts to recruit a suitable external candidate proved unsuccessful, despite repeated negotiation efforts: potential nominees, including Alexey Navalny and Yuri Shevchuk, rejected the offer, citing their unwillingness to engage in an unwinnable race (RBC 2011).

Despite the absence of competitors, Vladimir Milov's candidacy was not endorsed by his Parnas colleagues, who argued that compared to other Parnas leaders his level of recognition was low (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). Boris Nemtsov described Vladimir Milov's attempt to secure nomination as an irresponsible move that could put campaign workers at risk of political persecution, while not gaining any significant benefits for the party. Vladimir Ryzhkov highlighted their lack of resources to hold a nationwide signature collection campaign, noting that the inability to gather the required signatures on time could damage the reputation of Parnas.

During the 2011 party congress the majority of delegates voted to delay the final decision regarding Parnas' participation in the 2012 presidential election, which eventually resulted in the party's failure to nominate a candidate (Nemtsov 2011g; Volkov 2011c). At the same congress Vladimir Milov announced the withdrawal of his candidacy from the party leadership election and his intentions to leave the party (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). He described the position of his Parnas opponents on

electoral participation as defeatist and criticised them for initiating an intra-party campaign against him, in addition to their aggressive lobbying efforts (Milov 2011d; DemVybor 2012). Although Vladimir Milov publicly encouraged DemVybor members to remain in Parnas, many of his allies followed him and established an independent political party.

There were additional organisational factors that contributed to a lack of unity within the party. In the case of Parnas' merger, the emphasis on equalising the power of the four founding political forces within the party's governing bodies was not entirely justified. A large number of opposition activists joined Parnas in 2011 as the only fully independent party, as it was perceived at the time. As a result, the party's highly diverse membership was poorly represented by the four Parnas' co-chairs. Moreover, in an attempt to minimise conflicts within the party, the co-chairs agreed to divide the regional branches between them, with each leader maintaining control over certain regions (Vasilyeva 2014). This decision was met with resistance in some party branches, members of which were unwilling to follow directives from the Moscow-based leaders, who were detached from the regional intra-party dynamics. Contrary to the initial intentions, the division of regions intensified competition between the followers of different party leaders and frustrated a significant proportion of party members, who joined Parnas as a united party and expected it to function as a single political entity.

3.5 Causes of division (case 1)

3.5.1 Electoral strategy

Contrary to the expectations of opposition members, who were advocating for various forms of boycott, protest voting and opposition's later electoral participation did not strengthen the regime but rather, helped to undermine its legitimacy. Electoral periods increase the level of regime's vulnerability, which can often be used by opposition forces to their advantage. For example, most of the successful colour revolutions in the post-communist space happened in response to 'stolen elections', in which opposition forces played an active role (by nominating their candidates or endorsing others), rather than as a result of boycotted elections (Beissinger 2007; McFaul 2005)[3]. In an undemocratic political environment, the effectiveness of an election campaign is not always measured by the number of seats won but by the extent to which the opposition can advance its political agenda and how widely its political message can be spread. Investment of

[3] Examples include Serbia in 2000, Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004-2005

resources in non-winning campaigns can prove beneficial in the long-term if they contribute to the creation of a volunteer network, encourage the development of an election observation movement or provide candidates and campaign workers with valuable political experience.

For example, Alexey Navalny's 2018 presidential campaign did not result in electoral victory but successfully established a network of regional campaign teams that continued their work post-election. Moreover, regional and local-level elections, which are often not as strictly controlled as federal-level elections, provide an additional window of opportunity for the opposition (Bacon 2012, p. 115). For this reason, the decision of key opposition players to abstain from participation in elections often attracts criticism within the opposition community, as happened in the case of Alexey Navalny's non-participation in the 2014 Moscow City Duma campaign or the 2017 Moscow municipal campaign. For this reason, in 2018, when Alexey Navalny was denied registration for the presidential election, his campaign team attempted to distance themselves from the term "election boycott" and urged citizens to engage in a "voters' strike" (Navalny 2017b; 2018; Volkov 2018).

3.5.2 Democratic mechanisms

The conflict within Parnas regarding participation in the parliamentary and presidential elections exposed several weaknesses of the party that contributed to the division, such as the inability to establish clear rules around the nomination of candidates for federal-level elections and the weakness of internal democratic mechanisms. Parnas members made some steps towards the establishment of a more democratic party structure, compared to traditional opposition parties, such as Yabloko, which was often criticised for the excessive control of its leader over the party's decision-making. The four merging political forces agreed to establish a system of co-leadership in order to maintain the balance of power between them and prevent the dominance of any single party leader. Commitment to the idea of a primary election as a tool to select the strongest candidates within the party, which was expressed at the time of the party's establishment, was supposed to manage intra-party competition and prevent potential conflicts over candidate nomination. This measure was particularly important, considering the presence of several politicians with presidential ambitions within Parnas, including Vladimir Milov, Mikhail Kasyanov and Boris Nemtsov. Competition over the presidential nomination is a common cause of division within the opposition, despite the slim chances

of electoral success: a presidential campaign provides significant benefits for a candidate, for example, allowing a relatively unknown politician to gain nationwide recognition.

The procedure of primaries is generally viewed as a more democratic approach to candidate selection, compared to the approval of candidates by regional representatives (delegates) at a party congress. Primaries facilitate the involvement of all party members in decision-making and are less prone to manipulation through lobbying by party leaders due to voting by secret ballot. The same can be said about other types of voting with participation of all party members, as opposed to the party's governing bodies or regional representatives. An open vote by delegates, as happened in the case of Parnas, is commonly criticised as a weak democratic mechanism due to the risk of pressure from the federal party leadership, considering their powers to dissolve disloyal regional branches or exclude party members. As a result, these decisions often fail to reflect the dominant opinion within the party, leading to a disconnect between the party leadership and ordinary party members.

Despite the declared commitment to primaries, in practice candidate selection was not delegated to ordinary party members. Moreover, Parnas failed to establish clear rules for the candidate nomination process. For example, one of the party leaders, Boris Nemtsov, proposed to rely on opinion poll results, rather than internal level of support: he attempted to attract an independent candidate, who could be exempt from primaries on the basis of his higher approval rating, compared to Parnas leaders (Vlasenko and Tatarskiy 2011). In the absence of well-established rules, it is often easier for politicians with presidential ambitions to establish their own political organisations, instead of remaining within the existing parties and attempting to compete for nomination during future elections.

3.6 The second division within RPR-Parnas

In 2014 RPR-Parnas experienced the second split, when the co-chair Vladimir Ryzhkov left the party, along with other like-minded members, primarily affiliated with the Republican part of the party (RPR) (Interfaks 2014). This split received more public attention than the earlier exit of Vladimir Milov, partly because RPR-Parnas had become a registered party, and partly because Vladimir Ryzhkov and RPR were viewed as an integral component of the united party. The split proved to be consequential in the long-term since it contributed to a gradual decline of the party. One of the main competitive advantages of RPR-Parnas over other political forces was the concept of a united opposition party, with decision-making based on the consensus between several co-chairs representing different parts of the party, as opposed to being centred around a single

leader. The exit of the second leader brought an end to the idea of power sharing and provoked discussions about the complete breakdown of the RPR-Parnas party.

3.7 Nomination of Alexey Navalny

According to Vladimir Ryzhkov, the conflict between the Republicans and other party members started with the nomination of Alexey Navalny as the party's mayoral candidate in 2013 (Ekho Moskvy 2014c; 2014e). This nomination was approved by most of the Party Bureau members (the party's governing body), despite RPR members voting against it. Vladimir Ryzhkov interpreted this decision as undermining the "compromise principle", around which the party had been built, and the first step towards its gradual replacement by the majority rule (Ekho Moskvy 2014c; 2014e). In response to this critique, Boris Nemtsov explained that a vote on Alexey Navalny's nomination was the only democratic way of resolving internal disagreements on the issue (Ekho Moskvy 2014c). In addition, the candidate selection and nomination process took place under severe time constraints, associated with an unexpected early election; the circumstances demanded rapid actions, so a lengthy deliberation process was abandoned in favour of political effectiveness. Mikhail Kasyanov later explained that the party's priority at the time was to consolidate opposition forces and select a single opposition candidate (Ekho Moskvy 2013d). By the time of the Moscow mayoral election Alexey Navalny had already been widely perceived as the main opposition leader due to his leadership during the mass protests in 2011-2012 and the results of the Opposition Coordination Council election, where he won the largest number of votes.

Vladimir Ryzhkov claimed he was unwilling to cooperate with Alexey Navalny because of ideological incompatibility. Members of RPR criticised Alexey Navalny for his "nationalist" and "populist" political agenda, which in their view was incompatible with the liberal ideology of RPR-Parnas (Ekho Moskvy 2014e). They highlighted Alexey Navalny's previous participation in the controversial Russian March, an annual political event organised by Russian nationalist groups, which was condemned by many opposition members for the radical slogans that were commonly used by the participants (such as "Russia for the Russians" or "Stop feeding the Caucasus"). As Vladimir Ryzhkov stated in his interviews, he wanted to protect his party from any associations with the event that he considered unconstitutional due to its xenophobic rhetoric, which was fuelling hatred towards ethnic minorities and encouraging the breakdown of the country (Ekho Moskvy 2013i; 2014e).

Alexey Navalny explained his support for the nationalist political events by the need to "de-marginalise" Russian nationalist movement, which was largely excluded from the legal political sphere, including the electoral process (Lenta.ru 2011; Navalny 2013c). According to his words, his repeated participation in the Russian March was an attempt to shift its focus towards reasonable political demands (such as controlled immigration and putting an end to lawlessness within the Caucasian regions) and prevent extremist groups from hijacking the agenda of the event.

The nationalist issue came to the forefront of the Moscow political agenda during the mayoral campaign in response to a series of events that triggered both anti-migrant and anti-Caucasian sentiments among Russians. In Russia, the anti-immigration rhetoric is often associated with protests against subsidising Caucasian regions of Russia (Chechnya in particular), despite these issues not being directly connected. In 2013 several violent confrontations between ethnic Russians and members of the Chechen and Dagestani diasporas caused a public outcry that developed into demonstrations and public unrest within Moscow and beyond, with people demanding equality before the law for Russians and Caucasians (Pain 2013; Sharyi 2013; Demoscope Weekly 2013; Guillory 2013). Despite the fact that everyone involved in these clashes were Russian citizens, migrant workers became the main target of the response that followed from the Moscow authorities. To improve his rapidly declining approval ratings and demonstrate decisive action, the incumbent mayor Sergey Sobyanin launched a city-wide trade market "decriminalisation" campaign, initiating multiple raids to identify and detain illegal workers (Demoscope Weekly 2013). This campaign spread to other Russian regions; thousands of undocumented workers were detained across Russia, many of whom were placed in temporary detention camps, which were severely criticised by human rights workers for their inhumane living conditions (Kasparov.ru 2013). As a result of these events, the immigration topic became one of the central themes of the Moscow mayoral campaign, despite immigration laws and their enforcement generally belonging to federal-level politics.

During his mayoral campaign, Alexey Navalny repeatedly argued that lawlessness and corruption at various levels were at the core of both immigration issues and ethnic tensions, related to conflicts with Caucasian diasporas (Ekho Moskvy 2013b; Navalny 2013a; Lysova and Glikin 2013). In his view, the anti-Caucasian rhetoric among Muscovites was fuelled by selective law enforcement – the problem of people with ties to the Chechen political elite escaping justice (Ekho Moskvy 2013b). He also condemned

Sergey Sobyanin's response to the aforementioned events as inadequate and failing to address the root causes of the problem.

With regard to the issue of illegal workers, Alexey Navalny claimed that federal and local authorities, as well as private companies affiliated with the Russian political elite, were the main beneficiaries of the unfair and inefficient immigration system that they designed to suit their interests (Ekho Moskvy 2013b).[4] He emphasised that in Moscow, city and municipal authorities were among the main employers of undocumented workers – either directly or through private contractors, getting the job as a result of a rigged tender process. These included, for example, housing and utility services, city refurbishment and construction work, street cleaning and maintenance services. As Navalny pointed out, Moscow officials were profiting from the vast illegal workforce that allowed them to keep workers' salaries at an extremely low level, avoid providing essential worker benefits or paying income taxes. Several experts agreed about systemic corruption being the primary cause of large-scale illegal immigration in Russia: for example, Russian political analyst Kirill Rogov noted that those, who were responsible for combating illegal immigration and those, who benefitted from it financially – were parts of the same mechanism (Guillory 2013; Rogov 2013).

Alexey Navalny's proposal to introduce a visa regime with the countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus, which was included in his electoral programme, provoked debates within the opposition (Ekho Moskvy 2013a; Grani.ru 2013a; Kasyanov 2013a; Gontmaher 2013; Yankauskas 2013; Bystrov 2013). Some opposition leaders (such as Vladimir Milov and some representatives of the 5th of December Party) supported the proposal, whereas others criticised it, including a number of people who endorsed Alexey Navalny as a mayoral candidate. For example, Russian economist Sergey Guriev, who worked on the economic part of Navalny's mayoral programme, claimed that economic migrants did not have any significant negative effects on the Russian economy and argued in favour of their legalisation and subsequent transition from the shadow economy to the legitimate sector (Guriyev and Tsyvinsky 2012). Another economist Sergey Aleksashenko expressed a similar view, predicting the collapse of the Russian economy in the case of immediate deportation of all undocumented workers and, similarly, viewed their naturalisation as the only viable strategy (Ekho Moskvy 2013f). Mikhail Kasyanov, who voted in favour of Navalny's nomination by RPR-Parnas, also disagreed with the

[4] This discussion referred both to illegal immigrants and people, who entered the country legally but did not possess a work permit.

proposal. In his opinion, the introduction of visas would simply shift corrupt practices from one state agency to another (Kasyanov 2013a). Vladimir Ryzhkov described Alexey Navalny's position as irresponsible and contributing to the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Moscow authorities, who were trying to channel citizens' anger towards ethnic minorities. In his view, the proposed visa regime would do little to resolve the core problem – public discontent, related to the conflict with Caucasian regions of Russia (Ekho Moskvy 2013i).

Despite these ideological disagreements among opposition leaders, the mayoral campaign of Alexey Navalny united activists from most opposition forces and non-partisan opposition members with diverse ideological positions. Many of the interviewed opposition activists described this campaign as the most successful political event of the last decade and highlighted the formation of a broad coalition around Alexey Navalny as the key to its success (for more details see appendix 3.2).

Alexey Navalny's mayoral campaign proved to be transformative for the non-systemic opposition for several reasons. It demonstrated the effectiveness of the election participation strategy: Alexey Navalny won 27% of votes and the incumbent mayor Sergey Sobyanin only narrowly escaped the second round of elections, having received 51% of the vote. This was only 1% above the threshold and Alexey Navalny's team claimed that Sobyanin had only got over the threshold because of minor electoral fraud at some polling stations. They pointed to the discrepancies between the official election results and the calculations provided by the election observation alliance, in combination with a suspicious delay in the release of official turnout numbers (Navalny 2013b). Alexey Navalny's electoral success demonstrated the possibility of holding a successful election campaign in the absence of access to most major mass media and support from big donors or state funding (Navalny 2013d). Alexey Navalny's campaign relied on mass volunteer recruitment and crowdfunding, which facilitated the development of the volunteer movement in Moscow. It also set a high campaigning standard for future electoral participation, including the use of innovative campaigning techniques and focus on direct interaction with voters (through street canvassing and campaign rallies).

However, the success of this mayoral campaign did not bring any political gains to RPR-Parnas. Voters viewed the party merely as a platform for candidate nomination, which went in line with Navalny's campaign messaging. Navalny tried to distance himself from the party due to the negative reputation of its leaders, associated with the 1990s era and the first Putin's presidency. Canvassers reported a negative reaction to the mentioning of RPR-Parnas, which was generally avoided. This is illustrated by a fake

leaflet (below), distributed by Navalny's opponents, that showed him together with Parnas leaders Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov – an attempt to discredit Navalny by highlighting his connection to Parnas (Yakovlev 2013).

This negative attitude towards RPR-Parnas strengthened the views of those RPR members who had opposed Navalny's nomination. They argued that the decision to support external candidates went against the party's interests (RPR 2013). Moreover, Republicans were concerned about the possible cooperation between Navalny and RPR-Parnas post-election, in the form of a strategic alliance or a potential invitation to join the party made by the two other co-chairs and their allies (Ekho Moskvy 2014e).

This case highlights the unique role of Alexey Navalny within the Russian opposition as both a unifying and a divisive figure (see appendix 3.3). Similar to RPR-Parnas members, interviewed activists expressed contrasting opinions about Alexey Navalny: some portrayed him as the most successful politician capable of uniting opposition members with diverse ideological positions, whereas others reported difficulties around coalition-building with Navalny's participation due to his leadership ambitions. According to the latter group, cooperation with Alexey Navalny was only possible for those willing to accept his status as the main opposition leader.

3.8 Disagreements regarding party strategy and public image

There were additional issues that contributed to the division between the Republicans and other party members, apart from contrasting attitudes towards the nomination of

Alexey Navalny, including disagreements over the party's strategy, its public image and political rhetoric. RPR members highlighted the inability of party leaders to identify a common set of priorities due to their different approaches to political participation and party development (RPR 2013). For example, they emphasised the importance of regional electoral participation and the development of regional party units and criticised other leaders (Mikhail Kasyanov, Boris Nemtsov and Ilya Yashin) for their lack of interest in these activities. Republicans proposed to concentrate their efforts on political activities that were possible within the existing political framework and work towards achieving realistic objectives "there and then", rather than investing resources in protest actions and "waiting for the abstract collapse of the regime" (RPR 2013).

This division within RPR-Parnas can broadly be described as a conflict between the uncompromising anti-regime wing of the party (led by Kasyanov and Nemtsov) and proponents of a less confrontational and more flexible approach (Ryzhkov and RPR), which allowed for a limited dialogue with the authorities to advance the party's short-term objectives (Ekho Moskvy 2013e; 2013g). The conflict can partly be explained by the different origins of the party factions. RPR was a successor to the old Republican political party established in the early 1990s, geared towards party building and traditional partisan activities. The other two factions – the movement Solidarity and the organisation RNDS – were both non-partisan political entities, more focused on the promotion of political freedoms, critique of the regime and protest actions. Vladimir Ryzhkov highlighted this difference in one of his interviews: "Republican Party of Russia...one of the oldest parties in the country, united with Solidarity and RNDS. It was a very complex party from the very beginning because RPR has always been a very professional and moderate party, whereas Solidarity is a much more radical movement...Mikhail Kasyanov's RNDS is also something completely different" (Ekho Moskvy 2013k). In addition, the party recruited many new members, who had not been previously affiliated with any of the component forces but joined RPR-Parnas as the only fully independent opposition party, as it was promoted at the time. Those members tended to support an uncompromising anti-regime stance and oppose any negotiations with the authorities.

This strategic disagreement first came to public attention after the mayoral election in 2013, when the elected mayor Sergey Sobyanin proposed to appoint representatives of the non-systemic opposition to non-elected executive positions as heads of certain Moscow district boards. Reaction to the proposal varied among RPR-Parnas members (Parnas Vkontakte 2013a; 2013b). Vladimir Ryzhkov expressed his willingness to accept

the mayor's proposal and promised to support the nomination of suitable party members for these positions if they were sufficiently qualified and knowledgeable about local issues (Ekho Moskvy 2013e; AIF.RU 2013). In his view, this offer presented an excellent opportunity for RPR-Parnas to demonstrate effective management at the district level, establish a higher level of transparency and accountability within the given district boards, gaining wider public support as a result. He argued that the primary goal of any political party was to take part in political governance, and a refusal to participate in the governing process would call into question the very existence of such a party. He also emphasised that the positions in question were strictly managerial and non-political, which meant that the appointment of RPR-Parnas members would not require any political compromises on their part.

Other party leaders, Nemtsov and Kasyanov, firmly rejected the mayor's proposal and criticised Vladimir Ryzhkov for making public statements without any consultations with other co-chairs, as Ryzhkov's words were widely perceived as the official position of the party (AIF.RU 2013; Parnas Vkontakte 2013a; 2013b; Kasyanov 2013b; 2013c). Mikhail Kasyanov mentioned that he supported gaining office through electoral victories at various levels, but was opposed to accepting appointed positions, which he viewed as "integration into the power vertical" (Kasyanov 2013c). Ilya Yashin, the most outspoken critic of Vladimir Ryzhkov within the party, suggested that opposition forces had to demand making these positions elected (rather than appointed), instead of negotiating appointments with the authorities (Yashin 2013b).

This distinction between appointed and elected positions emerged long before the conflict within RPR-Parnas. For example, when a former leader of SPS Nikita Belykh was appointed as governor of the Kirov region in 2008, many opposition members interpreted it as a move towards systemic politics and a betrayal of the opposition's goals (Ekho Moskvy 2008; Kommersant 2008; Lenta.ru 2008). Boris Nemtsov described Belykh's decision to accept the appointment as his willingness to cooperate with the regime and a departure from the opposition's democratic principles (Nemtsov 2009; Ekho Moskvy 2008). Garry Kasparov assessed it in a similar way, arguing that Nikita Belykh was assisting the regime in the preservation of the status quo (Kommersant 2008). Electoral victories, on the other hand, were generally supported by the majority of opposition members, even in cases where elected representatives had little influence on the policy outcomes. The main difference was in receiving a mandate directly from the people and being accountable to the electorate, rather than their political opponents – United Russia officials. Boris Nemtsov highlighted the same difference between him

being elected to the Yaroslavl parliament in 2013 and expressing their willingness to work with Sobyanin-led officials, "turning a blind eye to their wrongdoings" (AIF.RU 2013).

The debate on whether cooperation with the regime was ever acceptable for an independent opposition party further intensified after Vladimir Ryzhkov's participation in the meeting with Vladimir Putin on November 20th, 2013, where he advocated for the release of political prisoners (Ekho Moskvy 2014e). RPR-Parnas received an invitation to attend a meeting between Vladimir Putin and representatives of non-parliamentary opposition, which the party declined after the majority of Political Council members voted against it (Grani.ru 2013b; Yashin 2013c; 2020). Mikhail Kasyanov, Boris Nemtsov and Ilya Yashin, along with many other party members, argued that such meetings only benefitted Vladimir Putin and compromised the independent status of their party. Ilya Yashin claimed that the proposed meeting with the President did not constitute real dialogue, but rather, was an attempt by Putin to improve his political image (Yashin 2013c; Ekho Moskvy 2013j). He described it as a carefully orchestrated event, aimed at demonstrating the openness of the Russian political system to the public, using opposition members to the advantage of the ruling elite.

However, the invitation letter was addressed to Vladimir Ryzhkov personally, who made a decision to participate in the meeting despite the party's official position (Grani.ru 2013b). According to Ryzhkov's later explanations, he viewed the meeting with the President as an opportunity to highlight important political problems: for example, he raised the issue of political repressions in Russia and attempted to draw the President's attention to the results of the public investigation into the Bolotnaya Square case (Ekho Moskvy 2014e). Ryzhkov's participation in the meeting triggered severe criticism among party members, who opposed negotiations with the Kremlin, whereas RPR members were generally supportive of the move. Vladimir Ryzhkov claimed that this disagreement led to a prolonged intra-party campaign against him, initiated by Ilya Yashin, who viewed Ryzhkov's position as a threat to the party's full independence from the regime (Ekho Moskvy 2014b; 2014e; Yashin 2014). Ilya Yashin argued that the main competitive advantage of RPR-Parnas over Yabloko was their party's reputation as an uncompromising anti-regime force, willing to nominate candidates without the Kremlin's approval, as happened in the case of the 2013 mayoral election (Ekho Moskvy 2014b).

RPR members, on the other hand, criticised confrontational rhetoric of their partners, which they considered counter-productive, as it could deter their moderate supporters from participating in party activities. Boris Nemtsov in particular was well-known for his anti-regime statements and personal attacks against Vladimir Putin: for example, he

produced reports about Vladimir Putin's personal wealth and promoted the slogan "the party of crooks and thieves" to describe United Russia (other examples are listed in appendix 3.4). His election campaign in the Yaroslavl region was centred around the anti-regime protest, human rights violations and exposing corruption, rather than specific local issues (Ekho Moskvy 2013c).

Vladimir Ryzhkov explained that RPR members had a different understanding of the political situation and political trends in 2013, after the wave of street protests had died down (Ekho Moskvy 2014e). Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov continued to predict the inevitable collapse of the regime and therefore, invested resources in various protest actions, petitions and the distribution of anti-corruption reports (Ekho Moskvy 2014d; Nemtsov 2011a). Republicans described these predictions as completely unrealistic: they perceived the regime to be stable and argued in favour of a gradual political change through the implementation of a long-term reform plan, developed in discussions with multiple political actors, including those in power (Ekho Moskvy 2013g; 2014a; 2014e). In their view, the anti-regime rhetoric, shared by everyone during the street protests in 2011-2012, became ineffective within the context of a steadily diminishing demand for protest actions among the Russian population. They proposed to abandon the "Maidan agenda" and rally slogans in favour of regular partisan work and a more constructive (moderate) political programme, more appropriate for a serious political party (Ekho Moskvy 2014e). Other party members, however, interpreted this attitude as the desire of Republicans to transform RPR-Parnas into a systemic party (Bobrakov-Timoshkin 2014; Yashin 2014; Nemtsov 2014).

The possibility of a limited cooperation with systemic forces or governing officials on specific matters was a common subject of debate within the opposition during the period analysed in this thesis (2011-2019). Another common topic of debate was the inclusion of certain politicians and political forces into the category of non-systemic forces or their exclusion from it in accordance with their degree of opposition to the regime. Positions on these matters can best be described as a spectrum, with some opposition forces being more confrontational (such as the Anti-Corruption Foundation) and others adopting a less confrontational approach (such as Yabloko or Civic Initiative). The former group was often criticised for exposing their members to unnecessary risks, for example, by encouraging participation in unsanctioned rallies, whereas the latter group was frequently accused of cooperation with the Kremlin and labelled 'systemic' or 'semi-systemic' opposition.

3.9 Power balance within RPR-Parnas

The third dimension of the conflict within RPR-Parnas was related to the balance of power between the constituent parts of the party and their respective leaders. The problem stemmed from a lack of integration between these factions, which prevented RPR-Parnas from functioning as a single party and contributed to a competitive relationship between party co-chairs and their allies. This issue was highlighted shortly after the party's establishment by members of Sverdlovsk regional branch, who expressed frustration at the lack of effort to consolidate the component parts of the merged party (Parnas Ural 2011a; 2011b; Volkov 2011b; 2011c). Similar concerns were raised again in 2013 by RPR members in an open letter: the authors criticised the lack of unity within RPR-Parnas, with different leaders pursuing their own political agendas and maintaining independent political activities (RPR 2013). Some Solidarity members agreed that there was more competition than cooperation within the party, partly due to the agreement by party co-chairs to divide the regional branches between them, which was met with resistance in some regions and interfered with the unification process (Vasilyeva 2014). Other party members complained that the rights of regional branches to make local-level decisions (including membership recruitment or the exclusion of members) were undermined by the party co-chairs, who extended their power struggle to the regions, each of them attempting to establish control over new regional branches (Grani.ru 2013c; Epifanova 2014; Ivakhnik 2014; Vasilyeva 2014; Karev 2014). One of the regional leaders described it as the same conflict between the moderate and uncompromising wings of the party, carried over to the regional level (Epifanova 2014).

This competition for power was exemplified by the split within the Saint-Petersburg branch of RPR-Parnas in November 2013 (Grani.ru 2013c; Vladimirova 2013; Korchenkova 2013). The branch was initially dominated by representatives of RPR, but their leadership was challenged by a group of new activists, who were trying to form a youth wing within the region and elect a different head of the branch – Andrei Pivovarov, a former leader of RNDS in Saint-Petersburg (Ivakhnik 2014). Both sides accused each other of attempting to bring in new members prior to the party meeting in order to gain a majority when electing regional party leadership (Vladimirova 2013). The conflict escalated when the federal party leadership intervened and approved the membership of 23 new members (associated with Pivovarov), despite the decision of RPR-led regional political council[5] to reject these membership applications (Korchenkova 2013; Shevchuk

[5] party's regional governing body

2013). This shifted the balance of power within the branch in favour of the new members. In response, 32 RPR members left the party without waiting for the inevitable defeat at the upcoming party meeting (Korchenkova 2013). Boris Nemtsov, who supported the incoming members, presented the crisis as a generational conflict between the 'old democrats' from RPR and the young activists, and criticised RPR's leadership for their rigidity and resistance to change and development (Korchenkova 2013). In his view, it was an attempt by Republican leaders to maintain their dominant position within the branch by blocking the entry of new members, who could challenge the status quo.

RPR members, in turn, accused their opponents of opportunistic behaviour: they described the situation in Saint-Petersburg as a hostile takeover and Vladimir Ryzhkov later called it a deliberate destruction of the regional branch by pushing his allies out of the party (Grani.ru 2013c; Karev 2014; Ekho Moskvy 2014e). Republicans condemned the actions of the federal party leadership, "who openly sided with the destructive group" in disregard of internal party rules, which left membership decisions to regional party councils (Grani.ru 2013c; Korchenkova 2013). RPR representatives explained their unwillingness to welcome the new members by ideological incompatibilities and the fact that existing party members were not familiar with these activists. In their view, these were "virtual candidates", recruited "in bulk" in order to outnumber Republicans during the vote (Vladimirova 2013). Boris Nemtsov, on the other hand, insisted that the activists were real and ready to work for the party.

This conflict was largely reflective of the power struggle at the federal level. In his interviews post-split, Vladimir Ryzhkov named the unequal balance of power within the party among the primary reasons for his exit (Ekho Moskvy 2014e). In his words, the principle of consensus, which he considered fundamental to their merger agreement, was violated on multiple occasions until it was completely replaced by the majority rule. This referred to the aforementioned important decisions, including the nomination of Alexey Navalny, the attendance of 'systemic' events or participation in local governance as appointed representatives – all of which were made in accordance with the majority opinion and against RPR's objections. Despite the declared commitment to consensus decision-making, no formal veto rights were included in the official party legislation due to the threat of blocking tactics by one of the component forces, which could paralyse party activity. Therefore, crucial political decisions were made through a vote by the party's governing bodies, based on the majority principle. This arrangement worked against RPR members, who struggled to acquire over one third of the vote, considering the regular cooperation between Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov.

RPR members argued that their important role in the establishment of RPR-Parnas as a registered party was not reflected in their relative weight in the decision-making process. As Vladimir Ryzhkov noted, Republicans were unfairly sidelined, despite their significant contribution through sharing their hard-earned party license with other merger partners (Ekho Moskvy 2014e). Other party leaders explained that the agreed consensus principle could not always be implemented in practice, particularly when the circumstances demanded rapid action, as happened in the case of Alexey Navalny's nomination (Ekho Moskvy 2014c; 2014d).

In the absence of veto rights, the power balance was skewed against RPR, who had some strong regional branches at the time of the merger but lacked the overall membership numbers to compete with its counterparts. The main value of RPR during the formal unification was its registered status, which was transferred to the merged party, leading to the loss of influence by the Republicans within RPR-Parnas. Moreover, in 2013 Boris Nemtsov was successfully elected to the Yaroslavl Regional Duma, whereas other regional election campaigns, coordinated by Vladimir Ryzhkov, did not bring any positive results, which further undermined the relative weight of RPR in the party (Sokolov 2014). In addition, potential future cooperation with Alexey Navalny threatened to decrease the influence of RPR even further.

The only advantage RPR had within the party was Vladimir Ryzhkov's position as the party's executive secretary, which empowered him to interact with state bodies on the party's behalf. Concerns regarding this position arose when party members became aware of certain steps[6] made by the Republicans with a view to registering an alternative political party (Ivanov and Goryashko 2014; Sokolov 2014). According to the two other co-chairs, these actions posed a threat to the existence of RPR-Parnas as a registered party and were incompatible with the holding of important administrative powers by Vladimir Ryzhkov (Ekho Moskvy 2014c; 2014d; Nemtsov 2014). Mikhail Kasyanov argued against allowing one person to combine the political role of a party leader with an important administrative position, considering RPR's behind-the-scenes activity. Boris Nemtsov also proposed to select a neutral person for this role in order to equalise the status of the three party leaders. RPR's attempt to put pressure on their colleagues through the threat of registering a potential new rival turned against the Republicans. Vladimir Ryzhkov announced his decision to leave the party before this issue could be put to vote.

[6] These included the formation of an organisational committee and the submission of a formal notification to the Ministry of Justice.

Vladimir Ryzhkov characterised the situation as a hostile takeover of RPR by his counterparts (Ekho Moskvy 2014e; Interfaks 2014). In his view, his removal from the position of executive secretary was part of a long-term strategic plan aimed at undermining Republicans' influence within the united party. According to Vladimir Ryzhkov's words, RPR made the decision to share its party license[7] with other merger members based on their promise of consensus decision-making. As he argued, having gained the majority, his colleagues used their dominant position against RPR in violation of the initial agreement, lobbying their political agenda and launching a public campaign to discredit the Republicans, which undermined trust within the party. Other party leaders presented an alternative position: they emphasised that the establishment of their union preceded the gaining of a party registration by RPR. In their view, it was the duty of any coalition member to share their license with others (Ekho Moskvy 2014d).

3.10 Causes of division (case 2)

3.10.1 Balance of power

The conflict between RPR and other party factions highlighted the issue of party license ownership that often triggered disagreements regarding the balance of power within parties and coalitions during the analysed period. Opposition members expressed contrasting opinions on whether existing party licenses belonged to specific political leaders (who invested personal resources in their acquisition), all party members or the opposition community as a whole. The presence of a party license offered significant benefits to party members, such as the ability to nominate party lists during parliamentary elections. This valuable resource was often used by the leaders of registered parties to their advantage: for example, as a bargaining tool in coalition negotiations. Some activists argued that these leaders did not deserve their privileged position within a merged party or a coalition, considering the unfairness of the party registration process. Moreover, leaders' control over their party licenses interfered with internal democratic mechanisms, exacerbating the problem of insufficient leadership rotation.

Opposition members in an undemocratic political environment face a number of complex questions that complicate coalition-building. Does a registered party have a moral obligation to share its license with other opposition members by providing a platform for the nomination of independent opposition candidates? What is the real value of a party registration in the longer-term, considering that it could be withdrawn at any

[7] RPR's party license was restored through the European Court of Human Rights

time? Opinions on these issues varied within the opposition. Interviewed opposition members attributed different levels of importance to party registration: some viewed it as a crucial element of effective political participation, whereas others did not consider it essential, given the unpredictability surrounding party licensing (appendix 3.5).

In addition, the case of RPR-Parnas demonstrated that the power within a merger or a coalition tended to shift towards factions that were more numerous and enjoyed wider public support, regardless of the initial agreements. Despite the ability of RPR to negotiate a favourable deal at the time of the merger, its members quickly lost power within the united party due to their limited resources and the lack of popular support for Vladimir Ryzhkov's position within the wider opposition community.

3.10.2 Ideological disagreements

Another debate that divided RPR-Parnas members was on whether to prioritise political effectiveness or ideological coherence. Prior to the mayoral election the majority of party members made a choice in favour of greater effectiveness and supported the nomination of Alexey Navalny as the strongest opposition candidate, capable of holding a successful election campaign. This decision was met with resistance among RPR members, who urged to prioritise the party's ideological principles, as well as the interests of internal candidates. Similar debates occurred within other opposition parties, Yabloko in particular; contrasting opinions on the issue are reflected in appendix 3.6.

Ideological disagreements within the opposition generally only occur when a politician's ideological position is viewed as overly extreme, as was the case with Alexey Navalny's nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric. Although Alexey Navalny's position on visas remained consistent throughout his political career (Lenta.ru 2011; Navalny 2014a; 2019a), his political agenda became more moderate and lost its nationalist component almost entirely, which allowed him to regain the support of opposition members, who had severely criticised his earlier nationalist statements (Akunin 2013; Parkhomenko 2013; Dzhanpoladova et al. 2013).

In the early 2010s, when nationalist and far-left movements were included in the non-systemic opposition, ideological debates were more frequent, compared to later years, when these movements were either dissolved or stopped participating in the activities of non-systemic opposition. Most non-systemic opposition parties described in this work had no distinct ideological profile: they admitted opposition members with diverse ideological views and focused on anti-regime activities that united opposition members (such as the anti-corruption investigations or promotion of basic democratic principles).

3.10.3 Moderate and uncompromising wings of the opposition

Despite similar ideologies, opposition groups differed in their means of political participation and their anti-regime rhetoric. Disagreements within RPR-Parnas between the moderate and the uncompromising wings of the party were largely reflective of the debate within the larger opposition community regarding the degree of confrontation, acceptable level of risk and the appropriate rhetoric. For example, during the wave of street protests in 2011-2012 opposition members expressed contrasting opinions regarding the possibility of negotiations between opposition members and Kremlin representatives (Ekho Moskvy 2012a; Yashin 2012). Some supported the idea, provided these were genuine negotiations about structural reforms and political liberalisation that could potentially lead to increased political competition and a peaceful transition of power. Others, such as Eduard Limonov, a well-known advocate of the 'zero cooperation' approach, argued that proponents of talks were actively "selling off public discontent" to the Presidential Administration (Ekho Moskvy 2012a). In particular, he criticised organisers of mass rallies for agreeing to change the location from the Revolution Square, which was much closer to the Kremlin and the Central Election Commission, to the Bolotnaya Square that could be easily managed by the police (by cutting off bridge access points to the Square, located on an island). According to Limonov, the opposition lost a narrow window of opportunity to push for regime change by accepting the new location offered by the Moscow mayor's office. Similar views were expressed by other opposition members in relation to these events, including a leader of the Libertarian Party Mikhail Svetov and Evgeniya Chirikova, the leader of the Green movement at the time of protests, who considered the decision to move protest actions away from the Kremlin a big mistake (Podrabinek 2016). Rally organisers, however, emphasised that the compromise was made in order to ensure the safety of participants.

Similarly, some opposition members criticised Alexey Navalny for accepting municipal deputy signatures from United Russia, required to be nominated as a candidate for the mayoral election in 2013. These debates highlight the varying degrees of tolerance towards interactions with the authorities among opposition members.

3.11 Conclusion

The creation of Parnas (later RPR-Parnas) as a union of several opposition forces became the only completed merger within the non-systemic opposition during the period analysed in this thesis (2011-2019). At the time of its establishment, the party had a number of benefits: it included several politicians with governing experience, managed

to build a relatively large membership base as a result of its powerful initial recruitment campaign and promised its members consensus decision-making with a view to avoiding excessive dominance of any single party faction. Parnas aimed to become the main opposition party in Russia and a more favourable alternative to Yabloko, which was often criticised for its reliance on a single unchangeable leader and a lack of internal democratic mechanisms. However, over time Parnas lost most of its competitive advantages and, having experienced several splits and the loss of most members, turned into a more typical Russian party, centred around a single political leader, Mikhail Kasyanov.

After the unification, Parnas failed to integrate its component parts and transform into a single party: the founding forces established a competitive, rather than cooperative relationship with each other. This disappointed many party members, who joined Parnas as a united opposition party. Despite its initial promises, Parnas failed to become a truly democratic party, which deterred potential new members, who were looking for an opposition party to join but did not support any of the Parnas co-chairs due to their associations with the era of 1990s and the first Putin presidency. Parnas was over-reliant on inter-personal relationships between the federal party leaders, who were detached from activists on the ground. In 2011 most of Parnas' co-chairs failed to embrace a more effective electoral strategy, supported by the majority of opposition members, and were reluctant to adopt more democratic tools of candidate selection, such as primaries, which caused internal divisions and made the party less attractive for new activists that joined the protest movement in 2011-2012. Moreover, new competitors appeared within the opposition – political parties People's Alliance (later – Progress Party and Russia of the Future) and the 5th of December Party, which promoted internal democratic mechanisms: the former promised to involve all members in decision-making through online voting tools and the latter established a decentralised organisational structure.

The nomination of Alexey Navalny as a united opposition candidate during the Moscow mayoral election in 2013 did not contribute to a higher popularity of Parnas within the opposition or among the general public but instead, caused conflicts within the party due to the contrasting attitudes of party leaders towards Navalny's political agenda. In addition, a mistrust emerged among party members, when one of the party co-chairs was accused of cooperation with the regime, which led to the loss of an important party faction – RPR. In 2016 Parnas experienced further division after an unsuccessful parliamentary campaign: many party members were disappointed by the inability of their leadership to organise an effective election campaign and a lack of accountability for the

party's poor electoral performance post-election – this case is described in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. Case study 2: Attempts to Establish a Broad Opposition Coalition – the Russian Opposition Coordination Council (2012-2013) and the Democratic Coalition (2015-2016)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses two unsuccessful attempts to establish a broad opposition coalition in the 2010s. The first case focuses on the so-called Russian Opposition Coordination Council – a coalition of opposition leaders formed through internal elections within the opposition community in 2012. Elections to the Council, which were open to any Russian citizen sharing opposition's values and goals, attracted much interest among opposition members and supporters. However, the high expectations associated with this new political entity were not fulfilled: it failed to achieve any significant political results and began to disintegrate after the first few meetings. The first part of the chapter explores the primary reasons behind its lack of success, including issues with the idea of the Council, its implementation and the main barriers to effective cooperation between its members, and examines why this promising broad union fell apart soon after its establishment. This case study demonstrates a set of issues frequently faced by young political organisations, including the inability to organise effective political activities and excessive focus on internal democratic practices, which paralyse the decision-making process. These issues lead to internal divisions and the exit of a significant proportion of members.

Much like members of Russian reformist parties that emerged during *perestroika* (described in chapter 2), members of the Russian Coordination Council engaged in lengthy debates over unimportant issues, instead of organising political projects or strong election campaigns. Similar to these early Russian parties, the Council faced a choice between different organisational strategies (prioritising professionalisation or openness and transparency), which created internal disagreements and divisions. Some members advocated for a greater professionalisation of the Council, its division into working groups responsible for different areas of political work and the prompt appointment of executives to deal with ongoing organisational issues. Others resisted the delegation of important tasks and decisions to working groups, insisting on the involvement of all Council members in crucial decision-making. The latter group also urged to prioritise transparency of their decision-making, which often implied waiting for monthly in-person meetings of the Council that were open to public viewing. Moreover, the obligation to provide equal opportunity for every Council member to engage in discussions before any decision could be made interfered with the Council's productivity and prevented it from

achieving any significant political results. Politicians, involved in the activities of the Coordination Council, derived some lessons from its lack of success, including the ineffectiveness of opposition unions without clearly articulated common goals and shared political agenda. Later opposition alliances generally took the form of electoral coalitions, which tended to achieve greater political results, compared to the Opposition Coordination Council, despite their inability to elect opposition representatives. These results included, for example, the development of a volunteer movement in Russia and the increased number of people with experience of campaign work. However, those electoral coalitions also proved to be relatively short-lived.

The second case, analysed in this chapter, describes the formation and activities of one such electoral coalition – the Democratic Coalition (2015-2016) that united several opposition parties, including Parnas and Alexey Navalny's Progress Party; this coalition fell apart during the 2016 parliamentary election. The second part of the chapter explores the primary causes of division that led to the exit of crucial members from the Democratic Coalition and the poor electoral outcome of Parnas. Despite the unwillingness of some political parties (such as Yabloko) to join the alliance, there were high expectations within the opposition community associated with this electoral coalition due to the presence of popular opposition leaders among its members and its declared ability to manage internal competition through a fair and competitive procedure – primaries. Analysis of this case is important for the understanding of contemporary divisions within the Russian opposition because disagreements that emerged during the coalition's existence had a long-lasting effect and prevented further alliances between Parnas and other opposition parties.

There were a number of factors that contributed to the dissolution of the Democratic Coalition. The disproportionately large political influence of one coalition member, Alexey Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation, skewed the balance of power within the Democratic Coalition and made such an alliance less attractive for other party leaders with political ambitions. The attempt of Parnas to negotiate a more favourable deal and reserve the first place on the party list for its leader, Mikhail Kasyanov, resulted in an unsuccessful election campaign due to his lack of popular support, both within the opposition community and among the general public. Parnas failed to attract sufficient human, organisational or financial resources to support a nationwide parliamentary campaign. Moreover, different attitudes of coalition members towards the idea of primaries as a tool to select the strongest candidates caused conflicts within the coalition.

There were some similarities between the failure of the Opposition Coordination Council and the Democratic Coalition. Despite the presence of additional factors, it was the ineffectiveness of political activities that became one of the primary causes of division in both cases. Members of the Coordination Council in 2012-2013, as well as members of the Democratic Coalition in 2016, left these unions due to their unwillingness to invest resources in unsuccessful political projects. Contrary to the initial intentions, the Coordination Council became a barrier to effective political work of its individual members due to the need to engage in fruitless discussions, instead of concentrating on specific political tasks. In the case of the Democratic Coalition, the inability of Parnas to organise an effective election campaign in 2016 became one of the main reasons for the exit of most members.

4.2 Establishment of the OCC

The Russian Opposition Coordination Council was a 45-member political entity that united politicians, political and human rights activists and other well-known opposition members that participated in mass anti-regime protests in 2011-2012. When the street protest wave began to die down after the Bolotnaya Square case in May 2012, the opposition movement started exploring alternative forms of coordination and political participation. Moreover, many opposition members felt the need to address the widespread criticism regarding their lack of constructive agenda beyond the anti-regime slogans and basic demands for political freedoms. There was also a desire within the opposition community to preserve and formalise the broad union of anti-regime forces that emerged during the mass protests. Many of the non-systemic opposition leaders that had earlier led these protests participated in the establishment of the Opposition Coordination Council.

The main goals of the Opposition Coordination Council, declared by its founders, included the establishment of a united opposition front, consisting of diverse opposition groups, coordination of their activities and collective development of a joint strategy for regime change, including a detailed political reform proposal (Faibisovich 2012a; 2012b; Ekho Moskvy 2012b; 2012c). The idea of the Coordination Council was largely based on a similar political structure, the Protest Actions Committee, which united diverse political leaders who organised mass rallies in 2011-2012. Elections to the Council, which were open to any candidate sharing opposition's democratic values and willing to pay a deposit covering organisational expenses, were meant to ensure the representative nature of the new political body and empower its members to make legitimate decisions on behalf of

the opposition community (Zheleznova and Kornya 2012; Tarakanov 2012). According to the initial plan, Council members were going to be elected for a one-year term, since it was believed that annual elections would provide opposition leaders with regular feedback from the public and increase their accountability. Russian citizens could become voters by registering on an electoral platform created for this election and going through a verification process. Although registration and voting took place online, regional electoral commissions were set up by local opposition members and representatives of civil society organisations allowing people to vote at polling stations (Volkov 2012f). Alexey Navalny argued that this openness guaranteed the formation of a more democratic political entity, compared to existing party structures in which leaders were elected by a relatively small group of members during party congresses (Tarakanov 2012). In his view, the Coordination Council was capable of voicing the views of a much wider category of active Russian citizens and could ensure sufficient regional representation that would address the problem of the opposition's Moscow-centricity.

Leonid Volkov, then a Yekaterinburg political leader and the main organiser of elections to the Coordination Council, viewed the primary goal of this political union in demonstrating the ability of non-systemic forces to reach agreements, coordinate their efforts and collectively develop internal rules and political strategies (Volkov 2012d; 2012e). As he explained, a well-coordinated Council could present a strong and clear alternative to the ruling elite, thus reducing public uncertainty associated with the potential regime change. Moreover, Leonid Volkov, as the main proponent of direct democracy practices, enabled by the use of online tools, presented the Council election as a step towards the implementation of this political model (Volkov 2012g). In addition, some candidates described the Council as a platform for political training – an opportunity for independent activists and politicians to gain political experience within the context of their complete exclusion from systemic politics, and for the rest of society – an opportunity to engage in political discussion and articulate their demands (Faibisovich 2012b).

Many voters perceived the establishment of the Coordination Council as the formation of an alternative parliament that marked the emergence of a parallel political reality in Russia – one with democratic processes, including fair and competitive elections. The Council's political model did resemble a parliament, rather than an independent political party or an electoral bloc: there was no membership system for supporters, any Russian citizen could vote in Council elections and participation in real elections was never declared among the Council's primary goals. This partly explains

why political parties, such as RPR-Parnas, Yabloko and DemVybor, refused to participate in the Council's establishment, although one of the RPR-Parnas leaders Boris Nemtsov took part in its election on an individual basis.

In order to ensure the inclusive and representative nature of the Coordination Council, the organisers introduced a system of ideological quotas, which implied the formation of three 5-member factions for representatives of the liberal, left-wing and nationalist opposition groups, in addition to the "general civic list", through which most 'seats' were allocated (Faibisovich 2012a). The decision to include ideological factions received much criticism: some candidates viewed quotas as an unnecessary measure contributing to the election of relatively unpopular members (Akunin 2012; Faibisovich 2012b). In particular, critics of the quota system opposed the inclusion of the nationalist faction, which, in their view, could result in the election of far-right extremists (Galperovich 2012). Others predicted that excessive ideological diversity would interfere with the Council's productivity and prevent the development of any meaningful political programme or reform proposals.

Moreover, there were opposition leaders who opposed the whole idea of the Council formation. For example, one of the RPR-Parnas co-chairs Vladimir Ryzhkov argued that the declared goal of uniting opposition forces could not be achieved due to the refusal of opposition parties to take part in this project (Faibisovich 2012a). Eduard Limonov described the Council's election as an unnecessary bureaucratic procedure, noting that leaders of successful protest movements in other countries were never formally elected by their supporters. In addition, the timing of elections was criticised since the Council campaign coincided with regional election campaigns, which did not allow opposition members to concentrate their efforts on winning real elections (Vinogradov 2012).

Despite this criticism, the Council's election campaign generated widespread interest within the opposition community; it included a series of debates and an essay competition for candidates, as well as a powerful information campaign aimed at explaining the voting procedures and the purpose of the Coordination Council (TV Rain 2012; Volkov 2012g; 2012h). Election organisers managed to overcome significant difficulties, associated with the cyber-attack against the electoral platform on election day and the need to filter out fake candidates and voters, who were trying to discredit the electoral process (Opalev et al. 2014; Vinogradov 2012). Although not all of these voters were denied registration, the overwhelming number of genuine voters prevented any significant skewing of the results. The voting was widely recognised as successful: election observers assessed the process

as fair and competitive, over 80 thousand people took part in the voting, electing 45 members of the Opposition Coordination Council (Vinogradov 2012; Gusha 2012).

However, the outcome of the election was in many ways predictable: Alexey Navalny, who had gained much popularity during the protests, received the highest number of votes and other well-known opposition leaders, such as Garry Kasparov, Ilya Yashin and Dmitry Gudkov, made it into the top ten. Moreover, as the results demonstrated, people tended to vote for candidates with a well-established public profile, including journalists, television presenters and writers, regardless of their campaigning efforts (Gorbachev 2012). It was clear that the Council election failed to achieve some of its declared goals: it legitimised the established Moscow-based leaders, while doing little for democratisation or decentralisation of the protest movement. Few regional activists were empowered as a result of this electoral process. Contrary to the declared intentions, the Council became even more Moscow-centric than the existing opposition parties, which had a legal obligation to maintain their regional branches (Kynev 2012). Although combined, regional voters tended to elect the same candidates with federal-level recognition as Moscow voters, each individual region had little chance of electing their local representative (Volkov 2012i). A system of regional quotas would have had a more positive effect on the Coordination Council's work, compared to the ideological factions.

Table 4.1 Elected Council members

General civic list	**Left-wing faction**
1. Alexey Navalny	1. Alexey Gaskarov
2. Dmitry Bykov	2. Yekaterina Aitova
3. Garry Kasparov	3. Alexandr Nikolaev
4. Kseniya Sobchak	4. Akim Palchayev
5. Ilya Yashin	5. Leonid Razvozzhayev
6. Mikhail Gelfand	**Nationalist faction**
7. Yevgeniya Chirikova	1. Daniil Konstantinov
8. Mikhail Schatz	2. Igor' Artyomov
9. Vladimir Ashurkov	3. Nikolai Bondarik
10. Dmitry Gudkov	4. Konstantin Krylov
11. Tatyana Lazareva	5. Vladlen Kralin
12. Sergey Parkhomenko	**Liberal faction**
13. Philipp Dzyadko	1. Sergey Davidis
14. Gennady Gudkov	2. Andrei Pivovarov
15. Lyubov Sobol	3. Anton Dolgikh
16. Boris Nemtsov	4. Anna Karetnikova
17. Olga Romanova	5. Pyotr Tsarkov
18. Oleg Kashin	
19. Andrey Illarionov	
20. Sergey Udaltsov	
21. Vladimir Kara-Murza	
22. Rustem Adagamov	
23. Alexandr Vinokurov	
24. Maxim Katz	
25. Suren Gazaryan	
26. Georgy Alburov	
27. Andrey Piontkovsky	
28. Vladimir Mirzoev	
29. Oleg Shein	
30. Vladislav Naganov	

Elected Council members (table 4.1) agreed to hold regular in-person meetings of the Council in order to make crucial decisions, while less important issues were to be discussed remotely using an online platform for discussions and voting. Despite the public enthusiasm and support for the Council at the election stage, first in-person

meetings hardly met the high expectations but rather, revealed a number of issues with the idea of this new political entity. Although there were experienced politicians and activists among its members, the Council encountered many of the same difficulties as young political parties did in the late 1980s-early 1990s and later, when a new generation of parties appeared in the 2010s. It quickly became apparent that the members' desire to adopt an inclusive democratic approach to decision-making interfered with the effectiveness of Council's activities. In addition, the inability of Council members to agree on the prioritisation of practical issues, related to organisation and coordination of specific political activities, led to divisions within the Council and the exit of many members.

4.3 The dilemma of democratic decision-making

In one of his post-election interviews, Alexey Navalny explained the Council's goal of establishing consensus decision-making and avoiding both the majority rule, which could alienate minority factions and lead to divisions, and the politburo model, with a small group of members holding the dominant position (Ekho Moskvy 2012c). In his view, Council members had equal status as elected representatives and therefore, deserved an equal right to influence the Council's decisions. Other members appeared to support this approach, however, this consensus principle proved challenging to implement in practice without affecting the Council's productivity. The requirement to give all 45 members an equal opportunity to engage in the discussion during in-person meetings and take into account all of the expressed objections and amendments, implied that any decision was preceded by lengthy deliberations (Transtuber 2012). Members felt the need to propose alternative options in order to be perceived as democratic, even in the case of relatively minor organisational matters, such as selecting a chairperson for the meeting or setting a deadline for the completion of certain tasks. Any decision or action, however insignificant, had to be approved by voting among the Council members either during in-person meetings or via the online platform.

Some attempts were made to optimise the Council's decision-making process. For example, Alexey Navalny suggested a more frequent use of online tools for discussions and voting on less important matters in order to avoid wasting time during in-person meetings. He also urged Council members to delegate more responsibilities to the working groups that had been formed within the Council, allowing members to approve pre-prepared documents more efficiently, but this advice was rarely followed: other members insisted on face-to-face discussions with everyone's participation as more

transparent and democratic (Policymonster 2012b). Human rights activist Sergei Davidis proposed to abandon the quorum requirement during meetings and consider amendments to be adopted if approved by the majority of attendees, rather than by the majority of elected members, which was important within the context of a steadily decreasing turnout (Policymonster 2013a). However, this amendment was declined: Council members, who voted against its adoption, such as Boris Nemtsov and Ilya Yashin, argued that there was a risk of delegitimising their decisions by making them unrepresentative. Despite the fact that the Council's work was effectively paralysed by endless debates and voting procedures, some members criticised certain decisions as insufficiently democratic. For example, political writer Andrei Piontkovsky left the Coordination Council, citing the undemocratic nature of the executive secretary selection process among the primary reasons for his exit (Piontkovsky 2013; Sabitova 2013).

This problem was largely a result of the members' desire to highlight the difference between the Coordination Council and the Russian Parliament, which, as its former chairman Boris Gryzlov noted, was not a place for discussion (Kuebler 2011; von Twickel 2011). Many of the Council members feared being accused of closed-door negotiations and therefore, attempted to demonstrate the openness of their discussion and transparency of voting procedures.

4.4 Ineffectiveness

Like political parties RPR and SDPR, described in chapter 2, the Coordination Council struggled to prioritise practical tasks, related to organisation of specific political activities or campaigns. Council's meetings tended to focus on relatively unimportant issues, including the development of internal rules or symbolic actions, such as issuing statements or adopting resolutions and declarations (Navalny 2012a; 2012b; Davidis 2012; Adagamov.info 2012). For example, during the first meeting members discussed the wording of the Council's official statement in support of political prisoners and the process for development of internal guidelines (Transtuber 2012). Further meetings were largely spent in debates over the content of two documents – a set of regulations aimed at structuring members' discussions and decision-making, and a programmatic document outlining the primary goals and objectives of the Coordination Council (Policymonster 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b). The process of their adoption, which included online and in-person debates, analysis of numerous amendments and voting to approve or decline each of them, eventually became the biggest barrier to any productive political activity

within the Council. This work divided the Council into several groups with contrasting opinions regarding the content of these documents and their importance.

One of the groups, which included Alexey Navalny along with his allies, the then State Duma deputy Dmitry Gudkov and others, suggested to minimise debates on these issues, proposing instead to concentrate their efforts on specific political projects. Their attempt to promptly appoint volunteers for executive positions in order to focus on other tasks was met with resistance by many Council members, who interpreted it as a backroom decision and a desire to lobby specific candidates. During one of the meetings Alexey Navalny's ally Georgy Alburov reported on the successful recruitment campaign, aimed at encouraging independent activists to become members of local election commissions in order to increase the level of electoral transparency; however, this and similar initiatives received little attention from the majority of attendees (Policymonster 2013b). The left-wing politician Sergey Udaltsov often suggested prioritising the organisation of street protest actions – one of the few practical topics that did receive the overall support within the Council (Policymonster 2012a; 2012b; Transtuber 2012). For example, members discussed the organisation of various rallies in support of political prisoners and against political repressions (Policymonster 2012a; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c). However, since the demand for street protests among the wider opposition community was decreasing, the organised actions had limited political effect.

An alternative view was presented by the Moscow politician Maxim Katz. Katz insisted on the adoption of detailed rules structuring the Council's work before the members could proceed with other activities (Katz 2012). He argued about the need to prioritise strategic tasks over tactical ones since the Council was poorly suited for participation in ongoing political activities due to a lack of resources and other means of influencing the day-to-day political agenda. Other members, who viewed the Coordination Council as a long-term project, also argued that the cumbersome process of establishing fundamental rules and regulations would prove beneficial during future Council terms (Ekho Moskvy 2013h).

The approved document included a variety of clauses, stating, for example, the number of votes needed to approve decisions, the quorum requirement for in-person meetings, the possibility of proxy voting, the process for the formation of working groups, budget-related regulations and the appointment of people to perform executive functions (Katz 2012; Policymonster 2012a). However, changing circumstances required frequent revision and renegotiation of various clauses (Policymonster 2012b; 2013a; 2013c; 2013d). Many Council members were demotivated by these lengthy discussions, which

displaced any meaningful political work, and stopped participating in the Council's activities. By the time of the fifth monthly meeting the turnout had fallen by half.

4.5 Goals and objectives of the Coordination Council

During the election campaign Coordination Council candidates expressed different opinions regarding the primary goals of the new political body, including coordination of opposition activities, representation of diverse opposition groups, development of political and economic reform proposals, collective work on various opposition projects and political training. After the Council's establishment and its first meetings, it became evident that most of the declared goals could not be achieved. Council members who viewed the Coordination Council as a proto-parliament quickly realised that it lacked an executive body to act on members' decisions or any enforcement capabilities. The Coordination Council, unlike a political party with a membership base had no activist groups required for the implementation of its political projects. It was also unable to coordinate the activities of independent opposition groups, who were unlikely to recognise the authority of the Coordination Council since it represented only a part of the opposition movement – for example, opposition parties did not participate in the Council's work.

Alexey Navalny hoped that the Council would follow a project-based principle, with members forming sub-groups responsible for different areas of work, such as the protection of human rights, protest actions, support for regional opposition candidates, election observation and other electoral activities (Ekho Moskvy 2012c). Some working groups were formed, however, it was not entirely clear how the new collegial body contributed to these political activities that existed within the opposition independently from the Council; rather, the need to seek approval of the Council's majority interfered with the political work of individual Council members. For this reason, the Coordination Council's predecessor, the Protest Actions Committee, was more efficient at organising protest actions than the respective working group within the Council.

Moreover, the diversity of ideological positions within the Council prevented the development of a coherent reform plan, as had been initially intended. Ideological incompatibilities also posed a barrier to its transformation into a conventional political party that could acquire important legal powers, such as the ability to nominate candidates for elections. The broad political union, based on the negative consensus approach, operated successfully during the period of street protests, when diverse political groups rallied around non-ideological demands, related to basic political freedoms and human

rights. However, a similar union appeared less effective when tasked with developing political programmes or long-term strategies.

Some members, including Maxim Katz and Sergei Parkhomenko, blamed the ideological quotas for the Council's dysfunctionality. In their view, the efforts of ideological factions to lobby their political agendas that had little support among other Council members or their voters triggered unnecessary debates and delayed the work of the Council (Katz 2013; Ekho Moskvy 2013h). This included the proposal repeatedly put forward by a representative of the nationalist faction, Nikolay Bondarik, to launch a civil disobedience campaign (Policymonster 2013b; 2013c). Bondarik's proposed campaign was to have included a boycott of state-owned banks and the oil company Rosneft, non-payment of certain taxes, draft evasion as a protest against compulsory military service, a boycott campaign against the Sochi Olympic Games and other similar measures. These actions were viewed as overly radical by the majority of Council members and potentially unpopular among the wider opposition community. Another member of the nationalist faction proposed to consider hunger strikes in solidarity with political prisoners – a measure that was also rejected by most Council members (Policymonster 2013c).

Maxim Katz cited the existence of ideological factions among the reasons for his exit from the Coordination Council. He noted that Council meetings, which were supposed to be gatherings of like-minded people, turned into a confrontation between legitimate members and those who were included as a result of closed-door agreements (Katz 2013). Katz emphasised, for example, that only one candidate from the nationalist faction, Daniil Konstantinov, received more votes than the "against all" option included in the ballot (PokerMoscow 2012). The main organiser of the Council's election Leonid Volkov also reflected that the idea of quotas was ill-conceived since it led to the election of relatively unpopular members within the ideological factions, while disadvantaging more popular candidates who were included in the general list (Volkov 2013). Therefore, the attempt by election organisers to avoid division within the opposition movement by ensuring representation of various ideological groups within the Council had the opposite effect.

Apart from their ideological positions, members differed widely according to their professions. The Council united politicians, human rights workers, writers, journalists, television presenters among others. Many hoped that this diversity would work to the Council's advantage, however, it often complicated its work due to conflict between different interests and agendas, such as the political and human rights agenda. For example, some members insisted on regular membership contributions, part of which were used to support activists facing politically motivated criminal charges (including

some Council members), whereas others opposed any compulsory donations, arguing that the Council could not perform the functions of a human rights organisation (Policymonster 2013a).

The adoption of a political manifesto outlining the primary goals and objectives of the Coordination Council created even greater division among its members than debates on the internal guidelines (Parkhomenko 2012; Piontkovsky 2012; Katz 2012). Members had different visions of the Council's role in the Russian political process and its capabilities and therefore, expressed contrasting opinions regarding the content of the document and its importance.

Many members viewed the adoption of this document as a crucial element of their success, while others questioned its value, considering the diversity of political views within the Council. A Council member, media investor Alexander Vinokurov, noted that manifestos and programmatic documents were a characteristic of political parties, rather than broad coalitions uniting members of different parties and non-partisan activists (Policymonster 2012b). Television presenter Kseniya Sobchak also expressed doubts regarding the need for such documents that contributed to divisions within the Council (Policymonster 2012b). Maxim Katz criticised the idea of political manifestos and public statements as ineffective, arguing that the majority of members overestimated the Council's political weight (Katz 2012). As he observed, the rhetoric of their statements was more suitable for a political body at the level of European Parliament, whereas in reality their meetings were closer to an informal get-together. In his view, these documents were largely addressed to the Council's loyal supporters and failed to accomplish the crucial goal of widening their audience. Katz proposed issuing texts that would serve as canvassing materials to inform undecided people. Apart from the political manifesto, these criticisms referred, for example, to the Council's public statement in support of political prisoners, which condemned political repressions without providing any details on politically-motivated criminal cases or specific evidence of the unjust nature of court proceedings.

Negotiations on the content of political manifesto divided the Council into two groups, one of which advocated for their uncompromising anti-regime stance to be reflected in the text, while the other adopted a more politically pragmatic approach, suggesting to avoid any harsh rhetoric that could deter potential supporters who were less politically involved (Policymonster 2013b). In particular, the latter group urged to abandon calls for a peaceful revolution against the criminal regime and instead, suggested to focus on more realistic demands, such as the judicial and electoral reform as a step

towards future democratic transition. Their opponents interpreted this approach as a willingness to compromise with the regime and a betrayal of the opposition's values.

A similar divide occurred with regard to the protest action strategy and electoral participation (Policymonster 2012b; 2013b; 2013e). Many Council members insisted on organising protest actions in response to ongoing events, such as politically-motivated court decisions, while some politicians, Ilya Yashin in particular, argued that overly frequent actions with a relatively small number of participants would prove less effective, compared to rarer events that had the potential to gather more people. The same difference in strategy can generally be observed when comparing political movements (Solidarity) and political parties (Parnas, Progress Party), with the former organising regular single-person pickets in solidarity with political prisoners and the latter focusing on more politically consequential events, such as mass rallies and marches.

The question of supporting opposition candidates during Moscow mayoral and regional elections also triggered debates within the Coordination Council. Despite the majority of members endorsing opposition representatives, a number of Council members strongly opposed any participation in the electoral process for fear of legitimising unfair elections and undermining the reputation of the Council (Policymonster 2013e).

4.6 The dissolution of the OCC

The exit of a significant number of members from the Council undermined its authority within the opposition, as it could no longer claim to represent diverse opposition groups. There were a number of factors that contributed to divisions within the Opposition Coordination Council and prevented its development into an effective political entity. Some of the elected members, who decided to leave the Council, emphasised the destructive role of ideological factions. This criticism generally referred not to the excessive ideological diversity *per se*, which is common within opposition organisations, but rather, to the idea of ideological quotas that were perceived as unfair and unrepresentative. Due to the overwhelmingly negative attitude among the electorate towards ideological quotas, the most popular left-wing opposition politician at the time Sergei Udaltsov preferred to run for election as part of the general civic list, as opposed to being included in the left-wing faction. The majority of liberal politicians and activists also ran on the general list, rather than as part of the liberal faction.

While the ideological differences prevented the Council's development into a political party, they were not the primary barrier to the effective functioning of the Coordination Council. The inability of Council members to distinguish between important political

decisions that required substantive discussions and insignificant matters that could have been resolved by appointed executives had a much greater effect on the Council's productivity. The efforts of Council members to demonstrate their openness and commitment to democratic principles often resulted in lengthy debates over minor procedural issues or the exact wording of various internal documents and public statements that were of little political significance. After several monthly meetings, which produced few results, a group of members emerged within the Council, who repeatedly proposed a number of measures to improve the Council's efficiency, such as delegating tasks to working groups and focusing their efforts on specific political projects or election campaigns. However, this approach was met with resistance among many Council members, who insisted on detailed and open discussions of various issues, including numerous amendments to internal documents, which required frequent revision. The third category of members assessed the Council as dysfunctional and stopped participating in its activities.

Soon after the Council's establishment it became clear that the newly elected body was incapable of fulfilling its declared goals: it largely failed to decentralise the opposition movement, it lacked the powers required to coordinate external opposition groups and was poorly suited for participation in the ongoing political activities due to the cumbersome decision-making process that constrained the work on political projects carried out by individual members. After several months of negotiations regarding the political manifesto, which was meant to clarify the main purpose of the Council, members approved a broad document that in many ways resembled opposition's statements issued during the earlier wave of protests. It highlighted the unfair nature of the Russian electoral process and outlined their ultimate goals (implementation of judicial and electoral reform, the release of political prisoners) and objectives (the development of a political and economic reform plan), which did little to improve the Council's effectiveness.

The most accurate prediction regarding the Council's purpose was expressed by one of its members, a well-known writer Dmitry Bykov, who expected the Coordination Council to become a platform for political training. Participation in the Council's election and activities did provide valuable experience for many of its members. Election to the Coordination Council became the first successful case of online voting organised by the Russian opposition, which was later used as a template for intra-opposition primaries. Moreover, opposition members drew a number of important lessons from the Coordination Council's failures, including the benefits of political parties and electoral coalitions, compared to broad non-partisan alliances, the futility of political statements

and the advantages of uniting around particular political projects. Later opposition coalitions, such as the Democratic Coalition of 2015-2016, were formed with a specific goal in mind – the election of opposition representatives at various levels. The following part of the chapter explores the case of the Democratic Coalition and the reasons behind its dissolution.

4.7 Democratic Coalition

The Democratic Coalition was an electoral coalition of non-systemic opposition forces formed with a view to electing opposition representatives during the Russian regional elections in 2015 and the State Duma election in 2016 (Navalny 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2015d; Meduza 2015; Svobodniye Novosti 2015). At the time of its establishment, the Coalition included registered political parties Parnas[8], DemVybor and Civic Initiative, unregistered parties the Progress Party (along with the Anti-Corruption Foundation), the 5th of December Party and the Libertarian Party, the political movement Solidarity and the political organisation Open Russia. The coalition agreement, initially signed by the leaders of Parnas (Mikhail Kasyanov) and the Progress Party (Alexey Navalny), who were soon joined by other opposition forces, declared the willingness of participants to form joint party lists on the basis of Parnas, with places allocated through all-opposition primaries.

This alliance provided significant benefits, such as the reduction of intra-opposition competition and the opportunity for its members to combine their resources. These included the ability of Parnas to nominate candidates for the State Duma election without costly signature collection procedures, organisational capabilities and fundraising potential of Alexey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and volunteer resources of member-parties. The Democratic Coalition faced a number of difficulties during the regional election campaign, associated with resistance to the idea of open primaries among some regional Parnas members and the conflict with Civic Initiative that resulted in two competing campaigns in the Kaluga region. Despite these challenges, the Democratic Coalition completed primaries, nominated candidate lists in accordance with the primary results and gathered the required number of signatures in their support in two out of three selected regions (Navalny 2015l; 2015m). The party list with the strongest electoral prospects (in Novosibirsk) was denied registration for the election, whereas the Kostroma list managed to reach the ballot, but failed to win any seats (Volkov 2015l; 2015m; 2015n; 2015o; Navalny 2015n). Debates regarding opposition primaries as a tool

[8] After the exit of Vladimir Ryzhkov and other RPR members RPR-Parnas was renamed Parnas

for candidate selection continued throughout the regional election campaign and beyond, with coalition members expressing contrasting opinions regarding both the idea and its implementation in 2015. Disagreements between member-parties on the role of primaries and the balance of power within the coalition contributed to internal divisions during the 2016 parliamentary campaign. Moreover, coalition members were disappointed with the weak election campaign of Parnas. Combined, these factors resulted in the breakdown of the alliance.

4.8 2015 Election campaign

Having learnt from the mistakes of the Opposition Coordination Council, coalition members avoided lengthy negotiations over detailed agreements and instead built a coalition around a set of basic rules and principles, including their commitment to a democratised candidate selection process through primary elections, the obligation of Parnas to nominate the winners during regional and State Duma elections and the promise of other member-parties to support joint party lists (Navalny 2015a; 2015c; 2015d; 2015e; 2015f; Volkov 2015b). Parnas was chosen as a platform for candidate nomination primarily due to its right to be registered for the upcoming State Duma election. This allowed for bypassing the signature collection requirement that presented a significant barrier for opposition candidates and parties. This advantage was gained by Parnas as a result of Boris Nemtsov's seat in the regional Yaroslavl parliament. In the absence of this exemption, gathering the required 200 thousand signatures from Russian citizens was a costly endeavour and organisationally challenging, given that people were generally reluctant to provide their passport details, without which signatures were deemed invalid (Volkov 2015a). Moreover, the submission of signatures to the electoral commission as legally prescribed did not guarantee opposition parties participation in the election: the high number of signatures left much room for electoral manipulation by the authorities, who could deny a party registration on the basis of minor flaws in the signature lists.

The option of uniting around the political party Yabloko, which, similarly, was exempt from the signature collection requirement, was rejected by coalition members on the basis of Yabloko's poor record of coalition-building. The party was generally only willing to cooperate with individual candidates, rather than political parties, and consistently prioritised the interests of its own candidates, regardless of their electoral prospects. Due to limited resources, the Democratic Coalition made a decision to concentrate their efforts on a limited number of regional campaigns in Novosibirsk, Kaluga and Kostroma regions (Parnasparty.ru 2015; Navalny 2015c). The choice of

Novosibirsk was determined by the relatively high proportion of opposition electorate and the selection of Kaluga and Kostroma – by their relative proximity to Moscow, which facilitated the recruitment of more volunteers for the campaign. It was expected that successful regional election campaigns would improve the image of Parnas and its electoral prospects during the 2016 State Duma election and in addition, ensure the preservation of the party's right to nominate candidates during federal-level elections without any additional barriers, which seemed fragile after Boris Nemtsov's death.

Alexey Navalny and Leonid Volkov, the main proponents of direct democracy practices within the opposition movement, insisted on holding open primaries that would allow any opposition member to be registered as a candidate, regardless of their party affiliation, and any local resident to become a voter (Navalny 2015e; 2015f; Volkov 2015c). Their arguments in favour of primaries were similar to those put forward earlier in support of the Coordination Council election: they criticised the common practice of candidate selection by a narrow group of Moscow-based party leaders based on their personal connections. Navalny and Volkov proposed to replace it with a more democratic and transparent process with participation of active citizens in the respective regions, which could ensure the selection of the strongest candidates. Primary elections in the three regions aimed to accomplish a number of additional goals: there was an expectation that democratically formed party lists would receive a greater support among the local activists, encouraging them to join the election campaign as volunteers. Alexey Navalny argued that primaries could also generate a wider interest in Coalition's party lists among the local population and that this could prove beneficial during later stages of the campaign, including the signature collection process (Navalny 2015e). Unlike in State Duma elections, during regional elections Parnas' party list had to gather a sufficient number of signatures within severe time constraints in order to qualify for registration (4500 signatures in the Kaluga region, 2800 in Kostroma and 11700 in Novosibirsk) (Navalny 2015g; Volkov 2015f).

This unconventional electoral agreement had advantages and disadvantages for the coalition members. On the one hand, it guaranteed participants equal access to the competition for candidacy. The decision to delegate the selection of candidates to voters provided smaller parties and independent candidates with an opportunity to compete for the top places on the party lists – something that would have been unlikely during more traditional negotiations between party leaders. On the other hand, there was an understanding within the coalition that candidates, endorsed by Alexey Navalny formally or informally, would have a significant competitive advantage due to his personal

popularity among potential primary voters. Moreover, the legal obligation to leave their political party and join Parnas in order to be nominated posed a significant barrier for members of registered parties (and chairpersons in particular), discouraging them from putting their candidacies forward. As a result of the ban on electoral blocs in Russia, only individual parties were allowed to be included in the ballot, which forced electoral coalitions to select a single party for candidate nomination in order to avoid competing party lists within the opposition. This meant that the coalition campaign had to be centred around the promotion of Parnas, whereas other member-parties could hardly increase their recognition and popularity. These issues created tensions between coalition members during the election campaign.

The Civic Initiative political party initially joined the coalition agreement but shortly after the coalition's establishment proposed to divide selected regions between the registered parties, instead of relying solely on Parnas (Pertsev and Zelenskaya 2015). Civic Initiative, led by Andrey Nechayev, the Minister for Economic Development in Viktor Chernomyrdin's first government (1992-1993), had limited political weight on its own. However, its cooperation with other opposition members that were excluded from the coalition agreement turned it into a significant player during the 2015 elections. This included the team of Maxim Katz, who had experience of holding a successful signature collection campaign in 2014, the then State Duma deputy Dmitry Gudkov and the former Parnas co-chair Vladimir Ryzhkov (Katz 2015a; 2015c; Mukhametshina 2015; Vinokurov and Dergachev 2015). Collectively, they were capable of forming an alternative democratic coalition. According to their words, Alexey Navalny and Mikhail Kasyanov announced the coalition agreement before negotiations with other parties were finalised, forcing others to accept the existing deal. Although the leader of Civic Initiative and his allies agreed with members of the Democratic Coalition about the need to avoid competing opposition party lists on the ballot, they advocated for an alternative electoral strategy allowing parties to demonstrate their electoral strength in different regions in 2015 before holding a new round of negotiations regarding the State Duma election in 2016 (Katz 2015c; The Question 2015). In their view, the coalition agreement granted Parnas politicians an unfair advantage, as other party leaders were forced to leave their parties in order to be nominated for the election. Moreover, as Andrey Nechayev argued, regional electoral victories of other parties would secure alternative platforms for the nomination of opposition candidates during parliamentary elections, creating a contingency plan for the opposition in the event of Parnas losing its exemption from the signature collection requirement (Mukhametshina 2015). Other Civic Initiative

representatives questioned the value of primaries, proposing instead to select well-known opposition politicians to lead the party lists.

Civic Initiative decided to hold a separate election campaign in the Kaluga region after negotiation attempts between the party and the Democratic Coalition had failed to yield any positive results. The latter group refused to compromise on the two fundamental principles of the agreement – promotion of one party brand during the regional campaigns in order to improve its future electoral prospects and the selection of opposition candidates through the competitive procedure of primaries. However, not all Parnas members were equally enthusiastic about the concept of primaries: in particular, the obligation to compete with external candidates for nomination was met with resistance in the Kaluga regional branch. The leader of the branch Tatyana Kotlyar, an experienced human rights activist and politician who had been elected to local governing bodies multiple times, reluctantly entered the primary race and, having narrowly lost the first place to a non-partisan candidate Andrei Zayakin, refused to accept the results (Navalny 2015i; 2015k; Dissernet; Volkov 2015h; 2015i). This incident exposed a significant weakness of open primary elections: despite the obligation of Parnas to nominate the winners of primaries, outlined in the coalition agreement, the legal right to approve party lists remained with the regional party branches. This created a conflict of interest, considering the desire of party members to promote their own candidates. Tatyana Kotlyar, as the regional Parnas leader, enjoyed significant influence within her party branch, so the majority of voting party members in Kaluga approved the list with Kotlyar at the top (Navalny 2015k). In their view, the party list headed by a politician with a well-established reputation in the region had a greater chance of electoral success. The winner of the primary election in Kaluga, Andrei Zayakin, one of the founders of Dissernet, a movement aimed at exposing cases of plagiarism in doctoral dissertations of Russian officials, who also volunteered for the Anti-Corruption Foundation, held an active primary campaign and was popular among the opposition members, but had no connection to the Kaluga region (Navalny 2015i). The federal leadership of Parnas made a decision to exclude Tatyana Kotlyar from the party list in order to comply with the Coalition agreement (Kasyanov 2015). She left the party and shortly thereafter was nominated as a candidate by the party Civic Initiative, before later switching to Yabloko (Katz 2015b; Yabloko 2015; Romanovich 2015).

There were other difficulties, associated with the chosen electoral procedures. Unlike partisan primary elections with participation of party members, regional Coalition primaries were open to any Russian citizen registered in the respective regions who

shared opposition values. This implied the inability of organisers to create a database of eligible voters prior to the election, which left the electoral process vulnerable to external manipulation, prevented the calculation of voter turnout and the adoption of a minimum threshold, below which the primary election could be deemed invalid.

The Coalition primaries attracted a relatively small number of voters, despite the impressive campaigning efforts of Alexey Navalny's team and the candidates. Only 1104 people voted in the Novosibirsk region, which equated to less than 10% of the required number of signatures in support of the candidate list, and even fewer voted in Kaluga and Kostroma (Bol'shakov 2015; Volkov 2015e; 2015g; 2015h; 2015j). The low number of voters created additional issues. There was a danger that results did not reflect the dominant opinion within the region and that the idea of primaries as an effective tool for candidate selection suffered reputational damage. Moreover, as the main organiser of primaries Leonid Volkov admitted, the goal of optimising the signature collection process had been achieved only in part due to the low level of participation (Volkov 2015e; 2015j; Bilunov 2015). He explained the reluctance of local people to participate in primaries by the novelty of this electoral procedure and a lack of trust among many potential candidates and voters, who feared that Parnas would modify the elected party lists. However, other opposition members blamed low participation on the excessive verification procedures, introduced to filter out 'fake' voters, who it was feared would select the least popular candidates and weaken the electoral prospects of Parnas party lists (Volkov 2015e; Bilunov 2015). In order to be registered as a voter, local residents had to answer a set of questions about the opposition primaries, the Democratic Coalition and the party Parnas. In particular, this step became a significant barrier for those who chose to register online: people were reluctant to respond to callers, aiming to test their understanding of the Democratic Coalition and verify their commitment to its values. Minimising the potential damage from 'fake' voters (part of the state-sanctioned effort to discredit opposition primaries) was among the organisers' priorities primarily due to the negative experience during the Opposition Coordination Council election, when a group of well-organised voters attempted to disrupt the Council's work by electing unpopular candidates (Bilunov 2015). However, the high number of genuine voters in the Council election prevented any significant damage. During the Democratic Coalition primaries 'fake' voters were successfully filtered out, but this was done at the expense of attracting a greater number of participants.

Coalition members assessed the experience of holding first opposition primaries in different ways. Alexey Navalny's team, who lobbied for the use of a similar candidate

selection procedure during the upcoming parliamentary election, highlighted the strengths of regional primaries, including the vibrant primary campaign that received significant press coverage, the increased competition within the opposition that encouraged candidates to mobilise their electorates, the discovery of new local politicians and most importantly, the successful allocation of the top places on the three party lists (Bilunov 2015; Volkov 2015d; 2015j; 2015k). In their view, the main goal of primaries was to identify candidates with sufficient support among the opposition community, those capable of attracting volunteer canvassers during the later stages of the campaign – a crucial element of electoral success within the context of limited resources. In addition, as Leonid Volkov argued, the competitive process helped to exclude candidates who previously had been relying on personal connections with the party leaders for their nomination, while enjoying little popular support (Volkov 2015j; 2015k).

Other Coalition members were more critical about the idea of primaries and its implementation during the 2015 regional elections. Many of them were disappointed by the low number of voters, considering the amount of financial and organisational resources involved in the primary campaign. Some DemVybor members questioned the value of primaries: in their view, this selection procedure disadvantaged regional candidates, who struggled to compete with Moscow politicians that decided to participate in the regional elections (Bilunov 2015; Yakovlev 2015). The latter group often enjoyed access to the national media, popular among the primary voters. This factor, as they argued, could lead to the creation of weaker party lists due to the difficulty of promoting non-local politicians among the wider population in the regions. In particular, this referred to Kostroma and Kaluga primaries, where Moscow-based candidates Ilya Yashin and Andrei Zayakin won the first place on their respective party lists.

Moreover, commitment of the Coalition leaders to primaries prevented their cooperation with a wider circle of opposition members (including political parties Yabloko and Civic Initiative) who refused to recognise this type of selection procedure. For example, Gennady Gudkov advocated for the use of opinion polling as a tool to select potentially winning candidates instead of primaries, which in his view, could only be effective within the context of an individual party with a high level of internal competition (Gudkov 2015). Representatives of Civic Initiative supported negotiations between the party leaders in order to select the political party that would serve as a platform for candidate nomination and to allocate competitive places on the party list (Katz 2015c). Both of these proposed alternatives to primaries offered advantages and disadvantages. Opinion polling could be useful for measuring the popularity of politicians with a

nationwide level of recognition, however, the poll numbers of regional candidates pre-campaign were likely to be equally low. In addition, it was challenging to arrange opinion polling, results of which would be recognised by all participating parties. Negotiations between political party representatives allowed to avoid costly and organisationally challenging primary voting procedures but were much less transparent and disadvantaged candidates who had no connections with federal-level leaders. At the same time, it was difficult to justify a significant investment of resources in the organisation of primaries, considering that the registration of winning candidates for elections was far from guaranteed.

Apart from contrasting attitudes towards primaries, there were other tensions within the Democratic Coalition, related to the balance of power between the member-parties, which, as some Parnas members concluded, was skewed against their party. Although Parnas candidates were successful during primaries, winning first places in two regions, Parnas as a party gained little as a result of the 2015 campaign. Opposition activists were unwilling to promote Parnas due to the overwhelmingly negative reaction among the general public to any mentioning of the party or its leader Mikhail Kasyanov (Bilunov 2015). This was partly a result of the long-term state-sponsored media campaign portraying Parnas leaders as former corrupt officials. Therefore, volunteer canvassers preferred to present candidates as members of the Democratic Coalition, pre-selected by local people though a democratic process; as a result, the popularity of Parnas did not improve, as had been expected. Moreover, it was Alexey Navalny and his allies, rather than the Parnas leadership, who were at the centre of regional campaigns – in terms of the primary campaign management, press coverage and the overall public attention that was focused on Alexey Navalny's regional rallies. This resembled the 2013 mayoral campaign, when RPR-Parnas was used as a platform for nomination, while its candidate actively distanced himself from any associations with the party. In an attempt to shift the balance of power in their favour, Parnas' leadership negotiated a new deal for the upcoming 2016 parliamentary election that promised more benefits for the party.

4.9 2016 Election campaign

According to the new agreement, the first place on the Parnas party list during the State Duma election was reserved for the chairman of the party, Mikhail Kasyanov, while other candidates had to compete with each other in primaries for their nomination (Parnas Primaries; Tatser 2015; Navalny 2016a; Interfaks 2015). Primaries were supposed to allocate the remaining 12 places on the party list – the number of candidates, who would

be guaranteed State Duma seats if Parnas cleared the 5% parliamentary entry threshold. Alternative options, discussed during the negotiation stage, included the invitation of several opposition members with a nationwide level of recognition to lead the party list, alongside Mikhail Kasyanov (Parnas Primaries; Volkov 2015p; Milov 2016). However, suitable candidates declined the offer; moreover, this option was opposed by the proponents of primaries within the coalition.

This time Parnas controlled the election campaign and the organisation of primaries, including the creation of an online platform for candidate registration and voting, design of which aimed to promote Parnas branding. The rules of primaries were similar to those during the regional elections: the competition was open to any opposition candidate sharing coalition's values, regardless of their party affiliation; Russian citizens of voting age could register as voters via the online platform for primaries.

During the first months of the campaign over 40 candidates were registered for the primary election, Parnas organised several rounds of debates on various topics and held meetings with activists and other events in different Russian regions (Parnas Primaries; Merzlikin 2016a; Parnas Facebook 2016a; 2016b). However, these campaigning efforts failed to achieve the expected results: the popularity of Parnas showed no sign of improvement, remaining below 1%, according to the polling data (Levada-Centre 2016). Moreover, the rate of voter registration for primaries was much lower than had been predicted: by the date of the primary election only around 25 thousand voters had been registered – a much smaller number, compared to the initially declared 200 thousand target or the number of voters during the Opposition Coordination Council election (Parnas Primaries 2016b).

Several factors contributed to the failure of the party's primary campaign. Parnas leaders faced significant barriers to effective campaigning in the regions, including frequent attacks by members of pro-Putin youth movements (Kasyanov 2016a; Rustamova et al. 2016; Radio Svoboda 2016a; 2016b). Primaries with partially pre-determined results did not generate sufficient interest within the opposition community but rather, attracted criticism from activists who viewed the decision to grant an unpopular politician the first place as an unnecessary compromise and a violation of the coalition's crucial principle of competitive candidate selection (Volkov 2015p; Navalny 2016b; Chichkov 2015). This negative attitude towards the new coalition agreement prevented mass volunteer recruitment and fundraising, and the limited resources of Parnas were insufficient to support a nationwide campaign. In addition, the party failed to recruit experienced campaign managers and other professionals who could ensure the

successful development and functioning of the online platform for primaries. Further significant damage to Parnas' election campaign came from the state-sponsored Russian television channel NTV, which aired footage of Mikhail Kasyanov's private conversations caught on a hidden camera secretly installed in his apartment, where he criticised his Parnas allies and other coalition members (Pertsev 2016). This tactic is commonly used by the Kremlin against its opponents in order to both discredit the opposition and trigger internal divisions. For example, in 2011 during mass protests another state-affiliated media Life News released private phone conversations of Boris Nemtsov, causing some conflicts between him and other opposition members (Demidova 2011).

It was clear that the already slim chances of electoral success were completely diminished by the NTV film about the Parnas leader. To make matters worse, Mikhail Kasyanov handled the situation rather poorly: his public statements were delayed and did not satisfy other coalition members, who expected him to give up his first place on the candidate list in the hope of improving the party's electoral prospects, or enter primaries on a par with other candidates (Yashin 2016a). Coalition negotiations that followed did not yield any positive results: Mikhail Kasyanov and his allies insisted on following the initial agreements, whereas representatives of other parties proposed alternative options, such as delegating the decision on the first place to coalition supporters (Kasyanov 2016b; 2016c; Merzlikin 2016b; Navalny 2016b; Milov 2016; Yashin 2016a; Goryashko 2016). This proposal was vetoed by Parnas, despite some party members endorsing it. In addition, Parnas leaders reopened the discussion regarding the need to recruit well-known candidates to take the second and third places without entering primaries in order to strengthen Parnas' party list, which was interpreted by other coalition members as a further threat to competitive place allocation (Kasyanov 2016b; Milov 2016). As a result, some candidates that were registered for primaries withdrew from the election and left the coalition, explaining their decision by a lack of commitment within Parnas to the principle of fair competition and the reluctance to invest resources in an unelectable party list (Antonova 2016; Sobol' 2016; Yashin 2016a; Milov 2016; Volkov 2016). Alexey Navalny, who could not become a candidate due to his criminal conviction, also left the coalition, admitting that entering an agreement which involved pre-allocated places on the party list was a poor political decision that costed them popular support (Navalny 2016b; 2016c).

Despite the exit of the strongest candidates, Parnas made the decision to proceed with the primaries. The two-day election was disrupted by a cyber-attack and subsequent data

leak, which forced party leaders to suspend the voting (Parnas Primaries 2016a; 2016b; 2016c). However, over 7 thousand people managed to cast their votes before the primaries platform was shut down (about a third of the registered voters), so the party congress approved the party list formed on the basis of these voting results (Parnas Primaries 2016b; Kasyanov 2016d). This decision provoked much criticism within the party: the winner of primaries Vyacheslav Mal'tsev, a former member of the Saratov regional Duma, was little known within the opposition community (Kara-Murza 2016a; 2016b; Yashin 2016b; 2016c; Sokolov 2016). Moreover, his nationalist views were perceived as inconsistent with the liberal values of Parnas. The attitude of other opposition members towards Vyacheslav Mal'tsev varied. Alexey Navalny, for example, supported his nomination by Parnas as a democratic move (Navalny 2016d; 2016e). Vyacheslav Mal'tsev's landslide victory was explained by his effective online campaigning via his popular YouTube channel "Artpodgotovka", the exit of strong candidates from the race and the low overall number of primary voters. Despite the opposition to Vyacheslav Mal'tsev's nomination among many Parnas members, it was not his candidacy that led to the party's poor electoral performance (Parnas' party list received less than 1% of the vote). This disappointing result was determined by a combination of other factors, including the underfunded election campaign, the reputational damage caused by the coalition breakdown and disrupted primaries, the unpopular party leadership and the consequent inability of Parnas to recruit volunteer canvassers and election observers, as well as the party's competition with Yabloko. Yabloko nominated some well-known independent politicians (such as Dmitry Gudkov and Vladimir Ryzhkov), in addition to strong internal candidates (such as the former mayor of Petrozavodsk Galina Shirshina or the former Yabloko chairman Lev Schlosberg) (BBC News 2016). Therefore, Yabloko's party list presented a significant alternative to Parnas and split the opposition vote. Moreover, Parnas and Yabloko failed to divide up majoritarian districts, resulting in competition between their nominees in some places and the victory of pro-regime candidates (Navalny 2016f).

The unsuccessful parliamentary campaign of Parnas led to a division within the party: many Parnas members attributed the disappointing electoral outcome to poor political decisions of Parnas' leadership, such as Mikhail Kasyanov's refusal to participate in primaries, and their failure to attract any significant resources for the campaign (Radio Svoboda 2016c; Yashin 2016c). Despite severe criticism of Mikhail Kasyanov within the party, he was re-elected as the chairman of Parnas at the party congress that took place several months after the 2016 parliamentary election (Kasyanov 2016e). As a result,

several members of the political council (party's governing body) and leaders of some regional branches left the party, citing a lack of internal democratic mechanisms as the primary reason for their exit. This included the absence of leaders' accountability for the party's electoral failures and the inability of party members to influence important strategic decisions or ensure a change in leadership.

4.10 Conclusion

The two cases of coalition-building attempts, explored in this chapter, demonstrate common causes of division within the democratic movement during the period analysed in this thesis (2011-2019).

Despite the presence of some ideological disagreements in the first part of the 2010s, primarily related to the question of inclusion of nationalist forces into the democratic opposition, it was the inability of new political entities to organise effective political work that generally led to internal divisions. After the establishment of the Opposition Coordination Council, a disagreement emerged among its members regarding the need to prioritise the effectiveness of their current political activities or the development of internal rules that would structure their work in the long-term. This type of disagreement is also common within young activist-based organisations with a low level of professionalisation. For example, a member of the Russian election observation movement, who was interviewed as part of my data collection (interviewee 10), reported a similar division within the civic group Citizen Observer, aimed at organising election monitoring. As he recalled, at the start of 2012 and prior to the Russian presidential election observers engaged in heated debates over whether to prioritise the development of internal regulations or the preparation for the upcoming election. The leadership argued about the need to focus on tasks directly related to the organisation of the observation process and urged to postpone any discussions on internal matters. However, a group of activists, who lobbied the adoption of more democratic and decentralised principles of organisation, insisted on the discussion of by-laws as a priority. This disagreement eventually led to the exit of the latter group from the Citizen Observer with the intention to start an alternative election observation movement.

The newer political parties that emerged out of the protest wave in 2011-2012 also struggled to organise effective political activities during the first years after their establishment. For example, members of the 5th of December Party dedicated a disproportionately large amount of time to discussions and debates over the content of the party's public statements that had no significant political consequences. A former

party member (interviewee 7) reported leaving the party due to a lack of productive political activities. According to his words, the party resembled a political discussion club, which motivated him to join a different political party. The issue of ineffectiveness is often associated with a lack of mutual understanding among members regarding the group's political goals and the inability to set realistic objectives, which encourages members to focus on the development of internal rules. Later, as newly established opposition forces developed and gained political experience, some of them became more effective than others in terms of attracting resources, running strong election campaigns and launching successful political projects. This created barriers to cooperation between more professionalised and effective political forces (in particular, the Anti-Corruption Foundation and its allies) and their less successful counterparts (such as political party Parnas). Although they managed to form an electoral coalition in 2015 and collectively hold several regional election campaigns, the alliance fell apart when some of its crucial members realised the inability of Parnas to organise effective campaign activities during the 2016 parliamentary election.

The experience of coalition-building during the 2015 and 2016 elections highlighted additional difficulties surrounding inter-party negotiations within the Russian political context. Negotiations between non-systemic parties are generally complicated by the fact that some of them lack formal registration and are therefore often forced to enter unfavourable agreements with their registered counterparts. It is challenging for the member-parties to reach a consensus regarding the balance of power within a coalition due to the absence of an objective measurement of a party's political weight, such as parliamentary seats or regional representation. During the 2016 campaign in particular, the right of Parnas to nominate party lists without signature collection was perceived as an unfair advantage that was used as a bargaining tool by the party leaders (Navalny 2016c). Attempts to equalise the balance of power within the coalition by democratising the candidate selection process did not fully achieve their goal. As DemVybor members argued, the adoption of primaries provided significant benefits for candidates who had access to powerful media tools or were endorsed by federal-level leaders but disadvantaged regional activists who campaigned on the ground (Yakovlev 2015; Bilunov 2015). It was clear that the main advocates of primaries, members of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, would become the main beneficiaries of this candidate selection system, furthering their dominance within the coalition, rather than achieving the equality of all coalition members. Some opposition members viewed the leading role of Alexey Navalny's team as justified because they were capable of contributing more resources to

the coalition than other political forces.[9] However, the disproportionate power of one player within a coalition made such alliances less attractive for other politicians and parties.

Another source of division was related to the demand for democratisation of the opposition movement that was not addressed by the offered mechanisms: as some opposition members noted, supporters were excluded from decision-making when the issues in question directly affected the interests of party leaders (Bilunov 2015). This critique referred to the primaries of 2016, the non-functioning democratic mechanisms within some parties that prevented the replacement of unpopular leaders, as well as other failed attempts to democratise the opposition movement, such as the Opposition Coordination Council election. As the case of Parnas demonstrated, it was often easier for members to leave their organisations and join other political forces than to achieve internal changes that interfered with the interests of party leadership. Within the context of unfair elections, internal failures of party leaders could often be blamed on the regime pressure. For example, Mikhail Kasyanov explained the unsuccessful election campaign of Parnas by the high level of regime pressure, including the cyber-attack and other attempts to disrupt primaries. However, other coalition members attributed this lack of success to the poor campaign management by Parnas and its inability to attract sufficient resources to support a nationwide campaign.

In addition, the debate on whether to prioritise compliance with the pre-campaign agreements or the improvement of coalition's electoral prospects highlighted the division between conventional opposition parties (Parnas, Yabloko, Civic Initiative) and political forces of the new generation (mainly unregistered parties and political organisations). The former category favoured traditional coalition negotiations that provided an opportunity for parties to advance their interests (and the subsequent implementation of the agreed rules), whereas the latter group of political forces advocated for a more flexible approach that prioritised the effectiveness of opposition activities.

[9] Based on the responses of opposition members interviewed for this research

Chapter 5. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Opposition Parties: Activists' Views

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses divisions between contemporary opposition parties in more depth by looking at the perspective of active party members. Going beyond the analysis of leaders' public statements and taking into account activists' views is important for gaining a better understanding of opposition fragmentation, as political interests of party leaders do not always go in line with the interests of ordinary party members.

In order to discover what prevented opposition parties from merging, a number of related questions are explored in my work based on my analysis of interview data, including: how the interviewed opposition members perceived the differences between various non-systemic parties, what determined their choice of a political party, their opinions regarding the main strengths and weaknesses of various parties within the opposition and the role of ideological or policy differences in parties' decision to remain independent.

Interviewees mentioned a range of criteria when choosing a party to join, including the effectiveness of the party's political activities, popular party leadership, internal democratic mechanisms and the ability of parties to offer new approaches to political participation. Although activists looked for similar things in parties, they assessed parties differently according to these criteria and in some cases, they had to prioritise one value over others. For example, some respondents criticised their parties for a leader-centric structure and a lack of internal democratic mechanisms, however, they still favoured them over less centralised alternatives due to the higher effectiveness of their political activities. This chapter identifies the main strengths and weaknesses of contemporary opposition parties and explores the activists' justification for preserving the independent status of minor parties.

Formal ideological or programmatic differences between parties (as outlined in their documents) generally did not play a decisive role in activists' decisions to join or cooperate with a specific party within the non-systemic opposition. The historical ideological division between Yabloko and the economic liberals (chapter 2) no longer existed within the opposition movement during the analysed period (2011-2019). Most activists tended to view all non-systemic opposition parties as liberal-democratic, as they campaigned for democratic transition in the country, political and economic liberalisation. With the exception of the Libertarian Party, other opposition parties accepted activists with diverse views, as long as they shared the core principles and goals

of the democratic movement. Alexey Navalny's nationalist agenda that was criticised by some party leaders in the first part of the 2010s did not deter activists with different party affiliations from joining his mayoral campaign in 2013 (chapter 3). The effectiveness of political activities became a much more important factor for opposition members when deciding to join a political party or support a specific opposition politician, compared to their policy proposals. Although policy debates did happen within the opposition, they rarely affected alliances between opposition forces or cooperation between activists. For example, Alexey Navalny's proposal to introduce a visa regime with less developed countries (chapter 3) or his later proposal to increase the minimum salary in Russia triggered debates among opposition members but did not pose a barrier to cooperation between activists on different sides of the argument. Similarly, during the 2016 parliamentary campaign many opposition members criticised the nomination of politician Vyacheslav Mal'tsev by Parnas due to his nationalist and populist statements (chapter 4). However, it was not Mal'tsev's rhetoric that deterred activists from joining the Parnas campaign but rather, the party's inability to organise effective campaign activities and its unwillingness to select a more popular leader to head the party list.

The following sections explore the most important factors that attracted interviewees into their parties of choice and the factors that deterred them from joining alternative opposition parties or considering a merger with them. The last section explains the relative unimportance of ideological and programmatic differences between parties in these decisions, mentioning, however, some exceptions to this rule.

5.2 Effectiveness of political activities

One of the most frequently reported reasons for selecting a specific political party over other possible options (or participating in the establishment of a new party) was related to its effectiveness, which was interpreted in different ways by different respondents: as the effectiveness of party's electoral and other political activities, as the efficiency of party management, the ability of leaders to offer innovative political agenda or the party's ability to maintain a stable structure.

The understanding of what makes a political entity effective varied, depending on the party affiliation of interviewees (appendix 5.1). For example, some interviewees viewed membership in a registered party as crucial to effective opposition politics. Others, on the contrary, argued that activities of non-registered political parties and organisations were more effective in an undemocratic political environment due to their greater flexibility and the ability to avoid costly procedures, associated with maintaining the registered

status of a party. Members of unregistered parties described "traditional" party structures, like that of Yabloko or Parnas, as cumbersome and ineffective. They favoured political forces that were less reliant on permanent memberships and focused on attracting non-partisan supporters during their campaigns. Some interviewees viewed repeated registration attempts as a waste of valuable resources, considering the politically motivated denial of registration.

Interviewees also highlighted several "success stories" that influenced their decision to join a particular political party, such as Alexey Navalny's Moscow mayoral campaign in 2013 (Progress Party) or the Moscow municipal campaign in 2017 (Yabloko).

Members of the Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation emphasised the effectiveness of their leadership team, the development of better political strategies and innovative tools to spread their political message, as well as the ability to organise effective election campaigning. These political innovations and organisational capabilities were primarily associated with Alexey Navalny and his team members (such as Leonid Volkov), who, according to the Progress Party members, introduced a completely new approach to politics starting with the mayoral campaign of 2013. This included the effective use of online communication tools (including Alexey Navalny's popular blog), efficient fundraising, with the majority of donations coming from ordinary Russian citizens, and the ability to recruit a large number of campaign team members and thousands of volunteers under severe time constraints. Many interviewees viewed Navalny's mayoral campaign as transformative for the opposition movement because it demonstrated the potential effectiveness of opposition politics, despite the unequal access to resources. Opposition members who joined the mayoral campaign were impressed by Navalny's ability to set his own political agenda and promote his political ideas effectively using the available tools, which led to their decision to join Navalny's party (called People's Alliance at the time).

In addition, the 2013 campaign facilitated further development of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which demonstrated greater effectiveness than most partisan structures due to their high level of professionalisation. One of the interviewees (9), a former member of the Progress Party, argued that the organisation also offered a new way of doing politics, which he called "politics as a service": gathering many small donations from Navalny's supporters (with many making monthly payments), the Anti-Corruption Foundation regularly carried out investigations into large-scale corruption cases in Russia, conducted opinion polling, launched anti-corruption campaigns and other projects. It also offered a greater level of financial transparency, compared to other

political forces, which allowed to attract more donors. For these reasons, interviewed members of the Progress Party and supporters of the Anti-Corruption Foundation viewed them as the most effective political forces within the non-systemic opposition.

Members of the registered parties, on the other hand, argued that effective political participation was impossible in the absence of a party license (appendix 5.1). In their view, successful electoral performance required a party with the right to officially nominate candidates and party lists for elections, particularly taking into account the higher participation barriers for independent (non-partisan) candidates introduced by the Russian electoral legislation. As one of the Yabloko members (interviewee 14) noted, considering the current political environment, a registered political party presented a rare and valuable resource that could be used by the opposition to its advantage. Another Yabloko member (interviewee 16) emphasised the importance of maintaining a stable party structure, including a system of party membership and functioning regional branches. According to several interviewees, some unregistered opposition forces resembled "social clubs", rather than political parties, and could not sustain effective political activity in the absence of a proper party structure. One of them (interviewee 7) named this factor among the primary reasons for leaving the 5th of December Party to join Parnas.

Yabloko members also highlighted the success of their local-level campaigns (despite the reported ineffectiveness of the central Yabloko apparatus – interviewees 14, 15, 17) and their party's ability to nominate a sufficient number of candidates for elections at various levels, unlike other opposition forces. As some interviewees noted, despite Alexey Navalny's personal popularity and his ability to hold powerful campaigns, relatively few candidates were put forward by the Anti-Corruption Foundation during multi-seat elections. This referred, for example, to the 2017 Moscow municipal election, which brought significant electoral gains for Yabloko (Meduza 2017a; Yabloko 2017).

While the Anti-Corruption Foundation could efficiently mobilise volunteers to support its projects and promote the existing political leaders, it did not facilitate the emergence of new politicians the way a political party could. As some Progress Party members (interviewees 8, 9, 10) admitted, the development of a political party was never among Navalny's priorities; rather, the Progress Party was treated as a peripheral addition to the Anti-Corruption Foundation, resources to which were only allocated to sustain its registration process (appendix 5.2).

Effectiveness of campaign management was an important criterion for the interviewees 15 and 17, who joined the team of Maxim Katz that was integrated into the

Moscow branch of Yabloko between 2017 and 2020. Maxim Katz is a well-known Moscow politician who started his career as a municipal deputy, participated in Navalny's mayoral campaign as a deputy campaign manager and became popular due to his activities as a co-founder of the Urban Projects Foundation – an organisation that aimed to improve urban development in Russia. He also ran for a seat in the Moscow City Duma in 2014 and later managed multiple election campaigns of various opposition candidates. An interviewed member of Maxim Katz's team (interviewee 17) partly attributed the success of Navalny's mayoral campaign to the efforts of their leader, who was in charge of setting up and scaling important campaign processes, such as street canvassing. Other interviewees mentioned the effectiveness of signature collection campaigns organised by Maxim Katz and his allies during various elections, as well as their ability to attract new younger audience into the party. In addition, some participants emphasised the contribution of Maxim Katz to the success of Yabloko's municipal election campaign in Moscow (2017). Katz, together with another politician Dmitry Gudkov, organised a support system for opposition candidates; Yabloko members became its main beneficiaries (Meduza 2017a; 2017b). The system was designed to optimise the management of campaign processes by issuing step-by-step instructions for participating candidates. It covered different stages of the election campaign, including assistance with overcoming the cumbersome candidate registration process, preparation of canvassing materials and fundraising; the system was labelled "political uber" for its convenience.

Contrasting opinions regarding which parties demonstrated greater effectiveness can partly be explained by the difficulty of measuring success and effectiveness of an opposition force within an undemocratic context. Different criteria were used by different opposition members, such as the number of elected local representatives, percentage of votes received during federal-level elections, the level of media presence, popular support in the form of crowdfunding and volunteer numbers, the presence of politicians with a nationwide level of recognition or others.

5.3 Party leadership

Another category of common responses regarding the choice between different opposition parties was related to the personality of their leaders (appendix 5.3). For example, members of the Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation reported selecting their political force largely on the basis of its leadership – Alexey Navalny and his allies, such as Leonid Volkov. These interviewees mentioned the effectiveness of their leaders and praised Navalny's ability to unite diverse opposition activists and attract

voters beyond the traditional liberal audience. Similarly, the factor of leader's personality played an important role in activists' decision to join DemVybor – this referred to Vladimir Milov.

As one of the interviewees (5) observed, the decision of opposition members to participate in the activities of a specific political force was generally driven not by the party's ideological component or its position on specific issues but rather, by their support for particular political leaders or, on the other hand, by their negative attitude towards certain politicians (such as Alexey Navalny, Vladimir Milov, Grigory Yavlinsky or Mikhail Kasyanov) and reluctance to join their team.

The 'Navalny factor' seemed to be particularly strong and divisive: according to interviewees' responses, Alexey Navalny attracted many supporters into his party and at the same time discouraged others from joining it, depending on whether or not opposition members accepted him as the main leader of the Russian opposition. Both groups explained this division by political ambitions of their opponents. Navalny's supporters blamed the other side for their inability to accept the greater popularity of Alexey Navalny, compared to other party leaders, whereas critics of Navalny attributed the divide to his ambition to be a single and irreplaceable opposition leader. At the same time, there were some members of the Progress Party, who criticised Navalny's strategy of undermining other opposition leaders; there were also members of other parties, who accepted Navalny's authority.

The negative attitude of many interviewees towards certain opposition parties (Yabloko, Parnas, Civic Initiative) was primarily related to the negative reputation of their party leaders (Grigory Yavlinsky, Mikhail Kasyanov, Andrey Nechayev), who were dismissed by younger activists as leaders of the previous generation, unpopular both among the general public and the opposition community. For example, they were criticised for avoiding participation in competitive procedures that could demonstrate their lack of public support, such as primary elections. According to many interviewees, leadership ambitions of these politicians curtailed the development of their parties and prevented any improvements in electoral performance. However, not all of the opposition leaders, who started their political careers during Yeltsin's or early Putin's presidencies, were equally unpopular among the opposition members. For example, Vladimir Milov, who briefly served as a Deputy Minister of Energy in 2002, was generally viewed as an effective politician. Boris Nemtsov, similarly, had a more positive reputation among activists, compared to his Parnas counterparts. He was praised for his ability to connect with ordinary people, which earned him a seat in the Yaroslavl regional Duma in 2013.

In addition, interviewees highlighted his important role as a connector between different opposition forces. Interviewee 4 explained the higher popularity of certain opposition politicians among activists by their ability and willingness "to work on the ground" with the electorate, rather than relying solely on media campaigns.

5.4 Internal democratic mechanisms

In addition, internal democratic mechanisms played an important role in the choice of a party for some opposition activists. This included the degree of a party's centralisation, its reliance on specific personalities and the presence or absence of leadership rotation. Several interviewees expressed disappointment regarding the personality-driven nature of opposition politics in Russia, despite the support of opposition members for democratisation of the country and decentralisation of political power (appendix 5.4).

Members of the 5th of December Party, for instance, regarded the Progress Party as a close ally and praised its members for effective political campaigning, however, admitted that they avoided joining it because of its leader-centric structure and reliance on a single unchangeable leader. As the interviewees explained, this factor made the party less attractive to local-level leaders, who believed that they could not realise their political ambitions within a party, where they had little chance of competing for the leadership positions. They viewed the Progress Party leadership as a 'closed system', consisting of Alexey Navalny and other members of the Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Interviewed members of the 5th of December Party highlighted its decentralised structure as the primary reason for joining this party or remaining within it. They considered it the only genuine grassroots party in the opposition, with all of its members involved in the decision-making process. This was reflected, for example, in the party's decision regarding the potential merger with Parnas in 2015-2016. The merger proposal was declined by the 5th of December Party as a result of the intra-party referendum held after internal deliberations with participation of all interested members. In addition, interviewees emphasised the ease of vertical mobility within their party – the ability of ordinary activists to build a political career and be elected to the party's governing bodies in the absence of any personal connections or political past. As they reported, a combination of decentralised decision-making and regular leadership rotation allowed multiple leaders to co-exist within the party and avoid conflicts.

One of the interviewed DemVybor members (interviewee 3), similarly, highlighted internal democratic mechanisms among the primary reasons for selecting this party after

leaving Yabloko (appendix 5.4), although mentioning his disappointment at a later stage regarding the excessive control of the chairman over the party.

Other interviewees, belonging to various parties, expressed concerns regarding the excessive centralisation of power in many opposition parties, including Parnas, Yabloko, Civic Initiative and according to some activists – also the Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation and DemVybor. This implied both political centralisation (the concentration of power in the hands of party leaders) and geographical (the inability of regions to influence the party's political agenda and a lack of effort to develop regional party units). Multiple interviewees criticised the dysfunctional democratic mechanisms within most opposition parties and a lack of leadership rotation, highlighting the problem of parties built around specific personalities.

Many interviewees reported successful inter-party cooperation at the activist level during the analysed period (in particular, between 2017 and 2019), which generally did not translate into cooperation between party leaders. One of the interviewees (8) noted that regional branches of various opposition parties were more interested in coalition-building due to their insufficient resources and low membership numbers. The same interviewee criticised the leadership of his party (Progress Party) for a lack of connection and accountability to ordinary party members and expressed disappointment regarding the abandonment of the direct democracy concept ("cloud democracy"), which was originally promoted as the party's main advantage (appendix 5.4).

The idea of "cloud democracy" was introduced to the opposition movement by Leonid Volkov and Fyodor Krasheninnikov (2013). It implied the establishment of decentralised governance, based on the principles of direct democracy and enabled by the use of online tools, allowing citizens to participate in political decision-making directly. In addition, the authors proposed to abandon the concept of political parties as permanent organisations with a stable bureaucratic structure and replace them with more flexible interest groups that would provide a platform for like-minded people to discuss a political programme and select their delegates (Volkov and Krasheninnikov 2013, p. 99). According to the authors, these new parties would not be long-lasting due to the ever-changing nature of the public political discussion. Volkov and Krasheninnikov were highly critical of the personality-centric party system in Russia, inherited from the 1990s, which produced a range of pseudo-parties that were reliant on one person for financial support and maintenance of the party structure (Volkov and Krasheninnikov 2012; 2013). As they argued, a lack of influential politicians in the regions led to substandard party politics, with parties created "from the top down" by a single Moscow-based politician

"fabricating" non-functioning regional branches and ensuring their loyalty through financial support (Volkov and Krasheninnikov 2013, p. 156). In their view, modern parties had to be created "from the bottom up", relying on crowdfunding and crowdsourcing to prepare a political programme and support the party financially (pp. 156-157). In one of their articles, Volkov and Krasheninnikov (2012) also outlined leadership rotation (the likelihood of changing the party chairperson within 3-5 years) as the main criterion for distinguishing between genuine and phony, "empty shell" parties.

There were a number of attempts to implement some elements of the described principle of decentralisation within the opposition movement, initiated by Leonid Volkov. For example, the concept of direct democracy served as a basis for organising the election to the Opposition Coordination Council in 2012, which was open to all opposition members. Later, the same concept was implemented (with varying success) in the form of primaries to select opposition candidates during the regional elections in 2015 and the parliamentary election in 2016. The Anti-Corruption Foundation, led by Alexey Navalny, Leonid Volkov and their allies, also demonstrated some elements of the proposed theory. It was funded through public donations and largely relied on volunteer support to carry out its projects and campaigns. During the period between 2017 and 2021 it developed a powerful network of regional units (Team Navalny), which contributed to the strengthening of regional opposition politics.

The idea of direct democracy was also developed within the Progress Party (also known as People's Alliance and Russia of the Future) in 2013-2014, which promised its members direct participation in the party's decision-making via the online platform "democracy 2". The platform, for instance, enabled party members to vote electronically during elections to the party's governing bodies and allowed members of the Moscow regional branch to decide on local matters through a popular vote. The initiative received overwhelming support among party members at the time of its launch but proved to be short-lived. One of the interviewed Progress Party members (interviewee 8) explained this by the discrepancy between the declared intentions and the actual use of the online platform, which failed to democratise party processes (appendix 5.4). According to his observations, ordinary party members never acquired any significant decision-making powers: issues that were put to vote within the Moscow branch were generally unimportant and online voting during intra-party elections merely legitimised the existing party leaders. He described the election of the federal party leadership as a procedure with a predictable outcome, resembling Putin's presidential elections. Despite being fair procedurally, the electoral process was not genuinely competitive: in the absence of

campaigning tools (such as candidate debates), regional politicians could not realistically compete with the Moscow-based leaders from the Anti-Corruption Foundation, considering the latter's high level of recognition. Despite some attempts to promote protest voting (voting against the incumbents due to their lack of involvement in party activities), it could not sway the results significantly.

Therefore, the voting system created the illusion of involvement but did not deliver the promised responsiveness and accountability. Relatively minor matters were decided through a popular vote, while crucial strategic decisions continued to be made by the leaders alone, including the question of cooperation with other parties, decisions regarding the party registration process or selection of a new party name. The idea of developing democratic mechanisms within the party, which was promoted by the leadership during the first few years after the party's establishment, was gradually abandoned. Moreover, after multiple unsuccessful registration attempts party-building became secondary to other political projects of the Anti-Corruption Foundation; following Alexey Navalny's presidential campaign (2017-2018), regional party branches were de facto replaced by a network of Team Navalny regional offices.

According to interviewee 8, party members' inability to influence decision-making was explained by the unusual relationship between the Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation: the party was to a great extent controlled by an organisation with non-electable leadership, which was accountable to its donors, rather than party members. At the same time, he admitted that truly decentralised projects, such as the 5th of December Party, regrettably, did not prove to be successful. In his view, within the Russian political context it was more beneficial to have a party with a recognisable leader, as it was easier for such parties to attract significant resources, both human and financial, as well as media attention.

Yabloko and Parnas received even more criticism regarding the lack of leadership rotation and detachment of their leaders from ordinary party members. As some interviewees noted, these parties were relatively open and democratic at the grassroots level. However, at the federal level they served as personal campaign vehicles for specific politicians, who were viewed as party license holders. Interviewees mentioned, for example, Yabloko's decision to nominate Grigory Yavlinsky as their presidential candidate in 2018 and Parnas' choice of Mikhail Kasyanov as the head of the party list during the 2016 parliamentary election, both of whom were unpopular among opposition activists.

In Yabloko, despite formal changes of party chairpersons, Grigory Yavlinsky remained the party's main leader and continued to make crucial political decisions. One of the Yabloko members (interviewee 14) described non-functioning democratic mechanisms within the party, rigged against Yavlinky's intra-party opponents. A similar trend could be observed within the Moscow regional branch of the party, which was led by Sergey Mitrokhin between 2004 and 2018. As the same interviewee mentioned, "...it has to be noted that opposition leaders change almost as rarely as presidents in Russia...".

A member of the 5th of December Party (interviewee 5) expressed a similar opinion: "...if we look at many opposition leaders that seemingly preach the commitment to democratic principles, such as the principle of rotation in power and others, many of them...view themselves as an exception. They believe that they should be repeatedly elected as a single leader..."

According to interviewees' responses, many activists who chose to join Yabloko did so despite its unpopular leadership (appendix 5.5), prioritising the party's registered status or its political activities at the local level, including successful electoral participation. A lack of responsiveness to the demands of ordinary party members created a disconnect between the dynamic political life of local Yabloko activists and stagnation at the federal level. For example, many interviewees attributed the success of Yabloko's municipal campaign in 2017 to the efforts of local campaign teams and the support system, organised by the politicians Dmitry Gudkov and Maxim Katz, while criticising the ineffective campaign management of the central Yabloko apparatus. A Yabloko member (interviewee 14) noted that the central campaign team was counter-productive and interfered with campaign activities, organised by individual candidates (appendix 5.5).

A similar critique was expressed in relation to the 2019 Moscow City Duma election (appendix 5.5), when a three-tier campaign management system emerged within Yabloko, including a central campaign team, the team of Maxim Katz and campaign offices of individual candidates. Activists involved in campaign activities described the contribution of the central campaign office as minimal. One interviewee (17) mentioned that they recruited very few signature collectors during the initial stage of the campaign and organised ineffective canvassing points primarily focused on the recruitment of new party members, instead of accomplishing campaign goals. Another interviewee (14) described the relationship between the campaign team of Maxim Katz and the central Yabloko team as that of fierce competition, rather than cooperation.

However, there were some alternative opinions within the party: according to one of the interviewed Yabloko members (interviewee 16), Grigory Yavlinsky maintained his

status as the main party leader legitimately due to his vast political experience and reputation as a federal-level politician with nationwide recognition. In addition, as the interviewee noted, Yavlinsky consistently managed to attract sufficient funds into the party, allowing it to maintain a costly organisational structure with functioning regional branches – a rare achievement within the opposition movement.

Some attempts were made to democratise candidate selection within Yabloko and Parnas in order to overcome their reputation as parties with undemocratic decision-making. The case of primaries on the basis of Parnas is explored in chapter 4. Yabloko organised a primary election in 2018, which aimed to involve party members and supporters in the selection of a Moscow mayoral candidate to be nominated by Yabloko (Meduza 2018). This internal election generated significant interest both within and outside the party and was regarded as a promising development towards democratisation of the Moscow Yabloko branch. According to the interviewed Yabloko members, the electoral process was fair and competitive, it included two rounds of elections with debates between candidates (Yabloko 2018). One interviewee (17) noted that many party members supported the winning candidate Yakov Yakubovich as a protest against Sergey Mitrokhin – the long-serving leader of Yabloko in Moscow, who was widely perceived as an unpopular politician, unable to compete with the incumbent mayor. However, this promising electoral process yielded a disappointing result: the winner of primaries withdrew from the mayoral race immediately after the internal victory without any obvious reasons, leaving Yabloko without a popular candidate. Interviewed Yabloko members offered a number of possible explanations for this withdrawal, including the unwillingness of Yakov Yakubovich to engage in a conflict between the established Moscow leader Sergey Mitrokhin and the group of new Yabloko members led by Maxim Katz, who encouraged Yakubovich to join the primary election and publicly endorsed him during the campaign.

These attempts to democratise opposition parties had some positive effects locally but failed to reach the federal-level leadership. Yabloko and Parnas in particular were criticised by the interviewed activists in this respect. Based on their responses, it can be concluded that opposition parties remained highly dynamic at the activist level throughout the analysed period (2011-2019), with a relatively high degree of membership rotation (including common party switching), while maintaining the status quo at the leadership level.

5.5 Demand for renewal

Another important factor that determined the activists' choice of a political party was related to the demand for renewal, change and development within the opposition movement (appendix 5.6). This preference was expressed by interviewees with diverse party affiliations and was reflected, for example, in the negative attitude of many activists towards the "older" ("traditional") political parties and politicians ("old democrats"), associated with the era of 1990s and the opposition of the previous period – before mass protests against electoral fraud in 2011-2012, which facilitated the emergence of a new generation of political forces. These interviewees, along with other factors, reported selecting their political parties on the basis of their ability to generate new political ideas and offer new approaches to political participation, as well as innovative political messaging techniques.

One interviewee (1) clarified that the distinction between the "old" and the "new" categories of political forces was not necessarily connected to the year of their official formation but rather, to the political image of their leaders and the party establishment, as well as the overall impression of the party within the opposition community. For example, as she explained, Parnas had a reputation as an "old", backward party, despite the fact that in its current form Parnas was created in 2011, around the time when the "newer" political forces were established, such as the Progress Party, the 5th of December Party or DemVybor, which interviewees considered more progressive. At the same time, the Libertarian Party was founded in 2008, but activists regarded it as a party of the new generation.

Some interviewees criticised "older" parties, such as Yabloko and Parnas, for their inflexibility – resistance to reform among the federal leadership and their inability to respond to changing political trends (appendix 5.6). Others mentioned that they were tired of the same politicians being repeatedly put forward by these parties during federal-level elections and their weak presidential and parliamentary campaigns, which failed to offer anything new to their electorate. In their view, democratic changes in the country could not be associated with leaders from the previous political era. "Newer" political forces, according to these interviewees, were more active, dynamic and therefore, more capable of responding to new political challenges and attracting new supporters. Several interviewees acknowledged the presence of some strong regional branches within Yabloko and electoral successes at the local level; however, they attributed these achievements to the work of local partisan activists, rather than the party as a whole.

There were some interviewees, who valued certain characteristics of older, well-established political parties, including their ability to participate in elections as registered parties, a more stable party structure or the presence of experienced politicians; however, they also welcomed internal reforms. For example, one of the Yabloko members (interviewee 16) disagreed with the aforementioned critique of his party: in his opinion, Yabloko's policy of avoiding any radical moves, which was interpreted by many as inactivity and sluggishness, provided significant benefits – combined with Yavlinsky's unique ability to balance between different interest groups, it allowed to keep the party afloat for decades. At the same time, the interviewee encouraged the renewal of the Moscow party branch and supported the change of its leadership.

Some interviewed members of Yabloko and Parnas reported joining these parties with the expectation of their renewal, others mentioned leaving them because they lost any hope of implementing internal reforms (appendix 5.6). The idea of renewing "older" opposition parties through attracting younger members, merging with a certain group of activists or accepting new leaders into the party was discussed repeatedly throughout the analysed period (2011-2019). Several attempts were made to implement this idea, with limited success: for example, in 2015-2016 some activists and leaders left the 5th of December Party and joined Parnas, in 2018 two well-known politicians Dmitry Gudkov and Kseniya Sobchak entered the party Civic Initiative and in 2017-2018 a group of activists led by the politician Maxim Katz merged into the Moscow branch of Yabloko.

In the first case, the low number of incoming members and their limited resources proved insufficient to bring about any significant development. This factor, combined with the negative attitude towards Parnas after its unsuccessful parliamentary campaign in 2016, did not allow to improve the image of the party, as had been initially intended.

In the case of Civic Initiative, the incoming leaders failed to generate sufficient interest in the party within the opposition community and therefore, attract any significant resources. A number of factors contributed to the failure of this united project, such as the unsuccessful presidential campaign of Kseniya Sobchak and her overall negative image among opposition members and the general public, in addition to the regular accusations against her regarding alleged cooperation with the regime.

In Yabloko, at the time interviews were conducted, opinions differed with regard to the potential success or failure of the aforementioned union in the long-term. Newly joined members were generally hopeful of a positive outcome, while others expressed doubts regarding the possibility of their full integration, considering the inevitable conflicts with the party establishment. Members of Maxim Katz's team described their

merger with Yabloko as an opportunity to combine the benefits of a well-established party (including a stable structure and a party license) with their professionalism in terms of effective campaign management, including the ability to organise a successful signature collection process required for candidate registration.

However, another Yabloko member (interviewee 14) characterised the situation within the party as resistance to change among the leadership and older members. He mentioned their distrust towards the newcomers due to the fear that Yabloko could be hijacked by an organised group pursuing their own political agenda. He also added that the leaders' idea of a party renewal "in some paradoxical way coexisted with the impression that older members would not need to give anything up." The interviewee described the relationship between these two groups of Yabloko members as confrontational, rather than cooperative.

The group of activists, who decided to join Yabloko following the call of Maxim Katz, spent a significant amount of time (Autumn 2016-Spring 2018) actively trying to be admitted into the party (RBC 2018; Katz 2016). The leader of the Moscow branch Sergey Mitrokhin attempted to veto the admission of these new members – unsurprisingly, considering that they did not hide their intentions to vote Mitrokhin out of office ("Mitroxit", as they called it) and opposed his candidacy in the upcoming Moscow mayoral election (Katz 2016). In his statement to the press, Mitrokhin excluded a large-scale admission of members and described the situation as a hostile takeover attempt by Katz supporters (Mukhametshina 2017). Katz's team, in turn, highlighted their significant contribution to Yabloko's success in the 2017 Moscow municipal election and insisted on the need for a renewal of Yabloko's Moscow branch through the admission of active supporters and leadership rotation. Maxim Katz interpreted Yabloko's initial decision to block the admission of new members as Mitrokhin's desire to maintain full control over the branch by eliminating any potential competition.

It is not entirely clear what motivated Yabloko to reverse its decision: activists' perseverance, successful negotiations between Maxim Katz and Grigory Yavlinsky or Mitrokhin's declining popularity among the existing party members, but after a lengthy probation period Katz supporters were officially accepted into the party. However, the confrontation and mutual criticism between Katz's team and their opponents continued. A Yabloko member (interviewee 14), who did not belong to either group, reported the delay in holding intra-party elections in Moscow and mentioned accusations of questionable voting practices against the new members. As he explained, members of Katz's team were criticised for voting on internal Yabloko matters in an organised manner

in accordance with the opinion of their leader, communicated to them in private messenger chats; for this reason, they were later labelled as a cult-like group (Yabloko 2020).

In 2020 Maxim Katz and some of his supporters were formally expelled from Yabloko. The official statement issued by the party cited their divisiveness and political interests, which were incompatible with those of Yabloko (Yabloko 2020). According to the statement, the recruitment campaign was organised by Maxim Katz with the sole purpose of advancing his political career at Yabloko's expense. However, Katz repeatedly declared his intention to continue cooperation with Yabloko and its candidates regardless of the party's official position (Ekho Moskvy 2020a).

The opinions of non-Yabloko interviewees on the conflict, similarly, varied: some criticised the political methods of Maxim Katz, arguing that his claim for power within the Moscow branch was groundless, whereas others viewed it as further evidence of Yabloko's inability to reform.

5.6 The degree of opposition to the regime and risk management

Interviewees expressed contrasting opinions regarding the number of political forces that were included in the non-systemic opposition. Some activists did not recognise certain political parties as fully independent from the regime (examples include Civic Initiative, Yabloko and DemVybor after Vladimir Milov's exit) and therefore, disregarded them entirely when choosing a party to join and excluded them from potential coalition partners on the same basis. In some cases, activists expressed distrust towards specific party leaders, such as Grigory Yavlinsky (Yabloko), Vladimir Ryzhkov (Parnas), Andrey Nechayev (Civic Initiative/Party of Change) or Kseniya Sobchak (Civic Initiative/Party of Change), who tended to be accused of cooperation with the Kremlin most often.

One interviewee (1) also criticised Boris Nemtsov for agreeing to move the mass protests against electoral fraud (2011-2012) to the Bolotnaya Square and away from the Kremlin, which she interpreted as a deal with the Moscow mayor and a betrayal of the opposition's goals. The same interviewee outlined the category of "semi-systemic parties", which included Yabloko and the Communist Party: according to her, these parties were independent and anti-government at the grassroots level, while demonstrating conformity and accepting compromises at the federal level. A number of interviewees (1, 2, 4) reported selecting their parties (Progress Party, 5th of December

Party and DemVybor before the split) on the basis of them being the most radically opposed to the regime and uncompromising (appendix 5.7).

Other interviewees adopted a more inclusive approach: they regarded all of the aforementioned forces as non-systemic, while at the same time acknowledging the unequal level of risk involved in their activities. Some of the interviewed opposition members preferred to join registered parties (such as Yabloko and Civic Initiative), whose activities were perceived as safer, as these parties were generally not involved in the organisation of street protests or other actions associated with greater risks for participating activists (appendix 5.7).

Activists who faced higher risks (such as members of the Progress Party/Navalny's team and some members of the 5th of December Party) tended to have a more exclusionary approach, narrowing down the category of non-systemic forces significantly and expressing harsh criticism towards "semi-systemic" forces and politicians (appendix 5.7). They were also concerned about the potential damage done by alleged infiltrators or other people within the opposition working against its goals. These activists viewed poor political decisions of certain politicians as a sign of their cooperation with the authorities, rather than a consequence of their political ambitions. This referred, for example, to the decision of Kseniya Sobchak to participate in the 2018 presidential election; she was labelled as a "spoiler candidate" by many opposition members. Other interviewees were more accepting of diversity within the democratic movement and willing to give politicians the benefit of the doubt.

5.7 The role of parties' ideological positions, programmes and policies

As part of my interview data collection, I was interested in identifying the role of ideological, programmatic or policy preferences in activists' decision to join a specific party and determining the impact of this factor on inter-party divisions. For example, interviewees were asked whether positions of parties and their leaders on specific issues attracted them into certain parties, or, on the contrary, deterred them from joining a particular party or cooperating with it.

Based on interviewees' responses, ideological differences between opposition parties were not generally named among the decisive criteria when choosing which party to join (appendix 5.8). There were some exceptions to this rule, discussed later in the text, such as the Libertarian Party. However, according to the dominant opinion, there was no ideological incompatibility within the non-systemic opposition that prevented inter-party

cooperation and policy preferences could not account for divisions between opposition groups.

Interviewees mentioned the importance of a broad ideological basis that united all non-systemic opposition parties and separated them from the pro-regime political forces. They outlined a broad set of values, such as "the European path of development", "European values", anti-Soviet and anti-Putin rhetoric, anti-regime and pro-reform agenda, as well as a number of political demands, related to basic political and civil rights, including regular, fair and competitive elections or "the rule of law". As some interviewees explained, it was pointless to campaign for specific policies, such as increased or reduced taxation, before they achieved more crucial political goals, related to political freedoms and human rights. According to others, ideological positions and programmes of opposition parties were simply too similar to each other to generate any meaningful ideological debate (appendix 5.8).

According to interviewees' responses, decisions to establish new parties in 2011-2013 (such as the Progress Party, DemVybor or the 5th of December Party) were not driven by the desire to fill an ideological gap but rather, by the goal of creating a more effective political force, gathering around more popular leaders or establishing a different organisational structure, compared to traditional parties.

Some interviewees mentioned their interest in specific political aspects that motivated them to join a particular political group. However, these were related to the political specialisations (strengths) of various groups, rather than ideological preferences. For example, one of the interviewees (11) noted her preference for human rights projects over anti-corruption investigations, which determined her choice in favour of the Solidarity movement, as opposed to Navalny's party. A member of Katz's team (interviewee 15) mentioned her interest in urban development – the primary political agenda of Maxim Katz at the time.

As one interviewee (10) noted, ideological disagreements generally emerged only in relation to non-liberal groups and politicians, whose views were considered overly extreme. This included, for example, the debate on the inclusion of far-left (Left Front) and nationalist movements in the democratic opposition or the nomination of the controversial candidate Vyacheslav Mal'tsev by Parnas during the 2016 parliamentary election.

Some respondents disliked the idea of using the left-right spectrum to classify Russian opposition parties and were reluctant to assign their political forces to any specific ideological category: "All these left-right dichotomies are misleading and have nothing

to do with reality...In Russia, there is one simple distinction – between those, who are independent and effective and those, who are dependent [on the regime] and ineffective." (interviewee 4)

Several interviewees observed that the most notable achievements of the opposition were associated with de-ideologized, catch-all ("umbrella") political platforms and campaigns that managed to attract activists with diverse ideological positions. According to these activists, Alexey Navalny's political success could partly be attributed to his ability to unite people from every point on the ideological spectrum. For example, interviewees who participated in Navalny's mayoral campaign in 2013 described the campaign team as a melting pot for diverse opposition activists. The wave of mass protests against electoral fraud in 2011-2012 was mentioned as another example of such unity. In both cases, participating forces were able to overcome ideological divisions by uniting around a broad set of shared values and demands (such as the demand for fair elections, the restoration of political freedoms and putting an end to human rights violations), as well as common objectives (including the organisation of protests or the election of an opposition representative in Moscow). In 2013, opposition activists campaigned for Alexey Navalny as a symbol of political change, which was reflected in his campaign slogan "Change Russia, start with Moscow", while not necessarily supporting all of the measures included in his election manifesto. Several interviewees mentioned the possibility of future tactical alliances with the ideologically distant Communist Party, particularly in the form of electoral cooperation at the local level.

According to interviewees' responses, political views of opposition members were a weak predictor of their party affiliation: the majority of parties welcomed activists with diverse views and official party programmes had little influence on the day-to-day work of partisan activists. Ideological discussions did happen within parties and other opposition groups, as well as between them, but were generally detached from their political activities and had little impact on the formation or breakdown of inter-party alliances. Some interviewees perceived frequent ideological discussions within parties as counter-productive and a distraction from real political action. For example, they criticised various opposition parties, the 5th of December Party in particular, for resembling "discussion clubs", rather than proper political parties. One interviewee (8) also highlighted Yabloko's tradition of regular intra-party discussions as a sign of their ineffectiveness.

The Libertarian Party presented an exception to this rule: ideological platform played an extremely important role for its members and the party was widely recognised as the

most ideology-driven political force within the democratic movement. One of its members (interviewee 18) in his interview mentioned frequent internal debates over ideological positioning and strict selection procedures that potential members had to go through in order to be admitted into the party. These checks were introduced with a view to ensuring ideological coherence and everyone's support for crucial policies, such as "the reduction of state intervention in the economy and private lives of people" (interviewee 18). One Yabloko member (interviewee 14) noted that the Libertarian Party was among the few opposition parties, who had a chance to outlive their leaders due to its strong ideological basis.

At the same time, the distinct ideology of the Libertarian Party did not seem to pose a barrier to its cooperation with other opposition forces. As members of different parties reported, while they found the ideology of the Libertarian Party too extreme to consider joining it, they were willing to cooperate with the Libertarians in various ways, including electoral coalitions. A member of the Libertarian Party (interviewee 18), similarly, expressed their willingness to engage in tactical alliances with other opposition forces and assessed their participation in the Democratic Coalition of 2015 as an overall positive experience.

In addition, interviewees expressed contrasting opinions regarding the importance of the ideological component within the parties DemVybor (appendix 5.9) and Yabloko. A DemVybor member (interviewee 3) described it as a party with a more coherent, right-wing ideology in comparison to other opposition forces. He emphasised the party's nationalist and pro-market stance and the willingness of their members to openly criticise Russian immigration policy and campaign for the introduction of a visa regime with less developed, low-income countries. However, another interviewee (4), a former member of DemVybor, disagreed with this viewpoint: he did not consider DemVybor an ideological party and argued that party's positions on specific issues, public statements or manifestos were secondary, compared to other factors that attracted activists into party, such as their support for the leader Vladimir Milov or the effectiveness of partisan political activities.

Opinions also differed in relation to the importance of ideology within Yabloko and the role of the party's ideological position in its reluctance to unite with other opposition forces. Some Yabloko members (interviewees 15, 16 and 17) presented it as a party with a consistent set of values, which party members were willing to defend even at the expense of attracting new supporters or winning additional votes. They mentioned, for example, Yabloko's unambiguous position on the issue of Crimea or its support for the

LGBT community, both of which were highly unpopular among the general public. In their view, the goal of an opposition party was not to unite as many opposition members as possible but to attract those activists and voters, whose views were consistent with the party's ideological position.

The same interviewees criticised Alexey Navalny for his "populist politics", which they defined as the desire to work exclusively with political issues that generated maximum public support at any given time and his unwillingness to campaign for equally important but less popular issues (such as LGBT rights). As they pointed out, Navalny selected the uncontroversial anti-corruption agenda as the main focus of his political activities; this allowed him to widen his support base, both within the opposition community and beyond. At the same time, these interviewees found his position on the more controversial Crimean issue vague and ambivalent, which they attributed to Navalny's fear of losing part of his support base. They also highlighted the inconsistency of his ideological position reflected in the differences between his 2013 and 2018 election manifestos. This critique was related to his shift from a typical right-wing agenda (promoting pro-business policies or stricter immigration rules) during his mayoral campaign in 2013 to a more left-wing electoral programme (proposing to raise the minimum salary) during his presidential campaign in 2017-2018; some interviewees viewed this change as a populist move. Alexey Navalny's political agenda is often described as populist due to its ideological incoherence and Navalny's unwillingness to engage in ideological debates (Lassila 2016; Laruelle 2014, p. 279).

This critique could be interpreted as a conflict between the policy-seeking and vote-seeking political forces. However, not all of the interviewed Yabloko members agreed with the description of their party as ideologically coherent: according to some, the party's declared uncompromising ideological stance was no more than a window dressing (appendix 5.10). One party member (interviewee 14) described Yabloko's ideological rhetoric as a "policy of double standards" due to the discrepancies between the declared values and the actual political decisions of the party leadership. As he noted, the attempts of leaders to portray Yabloko as the only genuine opposition party promoting democratic values could not be taken seriously, considering its long history of compromises, which earned Yabloko a bad reputation within the opposition community. In addition, he claimed that decisions regarding the acceptance of new members into the party or their exclusion from it were not determined by their ideological positions but rather, by their connections and personal relationship with the party leaders. For example, some members were welcomed into the party despite their disagreement with Yabloko's position on the

status of Crimea, while others, who openly criticised Yabloko's leadership, were expelled from the party under the pretext of their deviation from the party's ideological principles. In his view, Yabloko was willing to admit members with diverse ideological positions as long as they accepted Yavlinsky's authority within the party. A similar critique was expressed by a former Yabloko member (interviewee 3), who related his exclusion from the party to his public criticism of Sergey Mitrokhin – the then-chairman of Yabloko and leader of the Moscow branch – after his unsuccessful mayoral campaign in 2013 (appendix 5.10).

The exclusion of promising politicians from Yabloko frequently attracted criticism. For example, a former leader of Yabloko's youth wing Ilya Yashin and Alexey Gusev, who previously worked for Yabloko, both criticised Yabloko's internal policies within the context of Alexey Navalny's exclusion from the party in 2007 (Yashin 2013a; Gusev 2021). As they argued, the nationalist rhetoric of some members was used as a pretext for their exclusion – a tool targeted selectively against Grigory Yavlinsky's intra-party opponents, whereas similar ideological views of Yavlinsky's allies were ignored by the party. Alexey Gusev noted that Navalny was excluded after demanding Yavlinsky's resignation. Ilya Yashin was also excluded from Yabloko; according to Yabloko's official statement, the decision was made because of Yashin's participation in the establishment of the Solidarity movement, which was considered a potential new political rival (Yabloko 2009).

5.8 Conclusion

Although non-systemic opposition parties could seem similar to an outside observer, most of them had unique competitive advantages (appendix 5.11) that motivated activists to join them and preserve their independent status, despite the potential benefits of a merger with other opposition forces.

For example, members of the Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation, who viewed their political force as the most effective within the Russian opposition, expected their work to be hampered by the inefficiencies of other political parties. Members of the 5th of December Party were proud of their horizontal organisational structure, decentralised decision-making and regular leadership rotation – the benefits, which could be compromised by a merger with a leader-centric political force, such as the Progress Party, Parnas or Yabloko. They explained that the 5th of December Party strived to facilitate the emergence of new politicians and party leaders by providing support to local activists, whereas other parties often served the interests of the established leaders. As

these interviewees predicted, in the case of a merger with a more powerful political force, decision-making powers would be concentrated in the hands of the party leadership. Moreover, they expected their successful local politicians to be sidelined by the federal-level leaders, such as Alexey Navalny, Mikhail Kasyanov or Grigory Yavlinsky. Despite the limited resources of the 5th of December Party and its relatively low membership numbers, party activists were unwilling to abandon their mission of building a truly decentralised, activist-led party. Members of the Libertarian Party, who described themselves as the most ideology-driven political force within the Russian opposition, feared the loss of their distinct ideological component and were unwilling to accept ideological compromises required for a successful party merger.

Some members of registered parties were concerned about the potential loss of their party licenses in the case of a merger. One Yabloko member (interviewee 16) also mentioned the risk of destroying well-established party structures as a result of legal complexities and the difficulty of the integration process. According to his words, this threat was the primary reason Yabloko rejected a merger proposal from Parnas.

In addition, some activists were concerned about the potential reputational damage as a result of uniting with certain parties. For example, some interviewees were reluctant to engage in alliances with political parties or politicians associated with the era of 1990s/early 2000s and the opposition of the previous generation (including Parnas, Yabloko and Civic Initiative) due to their negative public image (appendix 5.11). These political forces were frequently criticised for their outdated approaches to politics and reliance on unpopular political leaders, who had little chance of improving their level of public support. According to members of unregistered parties, the presence of these politicians within the united party would hamper its development and prevent any potential electoral gains.

Some interviewees mentioned the negative reputation of several opposition parties, who were commonly accused of cooperation with the regime (appendix 5.11); in particular, this referred to Civic Initiative and DemVybor after the split (the exit of the party leader Vladimir Milov, along with his supporters). For example, interviewees 2, 4, and 14 described Civic Initiative as a "spoiler party" and its leader Kseniya Sobchak – as a "spoiler candidate" during the 2018 presidential election. One of them (interviewee 2) also highlighted the frequent appearances of DemVybor members on state television channels as a sign of their ties to the Kremlin. A number of interviewees included Yabloko in this category, which they perceived as semi-systemic. In their view, it was

counter-productive to unite with a political force that was not fully independent from the authorities.

Chapter 6. Cooperation Trends and Barriers to Consolidation: Activists' Views

6.1 Introduction

This chapter uses interview data to analyse issues related to cooperation between non-systemic opposition parties and explore additional barriers to party mergers. The first section highlights different attitudes of the interviewed opposition members towards different forms of inter-party cooperation: activists tended to prefer short-term, case-by-case cooperation over longer-term or permanent alliances. As interviewees reported, cooperation within the opposition movement was much better at the grassroots level, compared to the level of federal party leaders. Moreover, some of them noted that the involvement of federal party leadership often interfered with the effective functioning of local-level campaign teams and alliances between them, as party leaders were detached from activists on the ground and their needs.

The subsequent sections analyse the primary reasons behind the lack of support for party mergers within the opposition. Interviewees were asked a range of questions regarding previous merger negotiations, their attitude towards a merger with another political party or several parties, as well as their opinions on the idea of reducing the number of opposition parties in order to accumulate resources or allow for a more efficient use of existing party licenses. Activists mentioned various disadvantages of party mergers, including insufficient benefits to justify the effort involved, unequal balance of power within a new merged party, distrust towards potential merger partners and an anticipated decrease in the effectiveness of the involved teams.

A merger involved significant risks for the involved teams associated with the difficulties of integrating member-parties, potential conflicts between party leaders and the consequent loss of dissatisfied members. It was difficult for party members to justify these costs, considering the uncertainty regarding the potential gains: for example, merging with a registered party did not guarantee members a party license since it could be withdrawn at any time for political reasons. Larger parties were reluctant to merge with the smaller ones, as the benefits of such an alliance were considered insufficient. Moreover, some activists argued that it was more beneficial to cooperate without merging into one organisation. Instead, they proposed to share resources in order to support specific projects or campaigns. The negative attitude towards mergers and other long-term alliances among opposition members was also explained by the unsuccessful attempts to establish such coalitions in the past. For example, the case of the Opposition Coordination Council, described in chapter 4, demonstrated that uniting diverse forces

within one organisation could interfere with their productivity. Council members wasted time trying to negotiate and reach an agreement on various issues, instead of investing their resources in specific political activities.

A lack of commonly accepted measurement of a party's current political weight became another barrier to a merger. Within a democratic environment, a party's recent vote gains, parliamentary seat numbers or membership numbers could be used in merger negotiations to determine its relative political weight and the number of its representatives in the governing bodies of a newly merged party. However, in Russia, where some parties were excluded from the electoral process, it was challenging to assess a party's potential contribution to the alliance and negotiate a fair deal that would satisfy all merger members. For example, Alexey Navalny's political force (Anti-Corruption Foundation and the Progress Party) was widely perceived as the strongest and the most effective political entity within the opposition. However, it lacked a formal party registration and nominated fewer candidates for local and regional elections, compared to Yabloko. Yabloko had some local electoral successes, such as the election of 180 Moscow municipal deputies in 2017 (Yabloko 2017; Meduza 2017a; 2017b). At the same time, the party's federal leadership was generally viewed as unpopular and ineffective. Other parties, similarly, had strengths and weaknesses that were difficult to assess and compare, which complicated potential merger negotiations. Some activists feared that their parties would be completely absorbed by the merger partners. Others, registered parties in particular, were reluctant to engage in a merger due to the fear of being captured from within by the incoming strong activist groups.

Party members were also concerned about the possible loss of their party's competitive advantages, which are described in the previous chapter (5). For example, members of the 5th of December Party wanted to preserve their decentralised structure and therefore, were unwilling to merge with leader-centric parties. Members of the Libertarian Party, who considered themselves as the only truly ideological party within the opposition, were reluctant to merge with other parties, as a merger would require ideological compromises. Registered parties, in turn, feared the loss of their existing party licenses due to the legal complexities of the merger process. In addition, interviewees emphasised the ambitions of party leaders and their desire to maintain control over their parties as one of the most significant barriers to a successful party merger within the opposition. At the same time, ordinary members from different opposition parties tended to maintain connections and engage in each other's political projects, regardless of inter-party conflicts at the leadership level.

Some concerns related to party mergers, expressed by the interviewees, were illustrated by the case of political party Parnas (chapter 3), which started as a merger of several political organisations and experienced several splits, losing most of its initial membership base. The party leadership failed to integrate the component parts of the party or establish a fair balance of power that would satisfy different party members and their leaders. As a result, party factions established a competitive, rather than cooperative relationship with each other, which led to internal divisions. Moreover, many members left the party due to its leader-centric structure, a lack of leadership accountability for their mistakes and their detachment from activists on the ground.

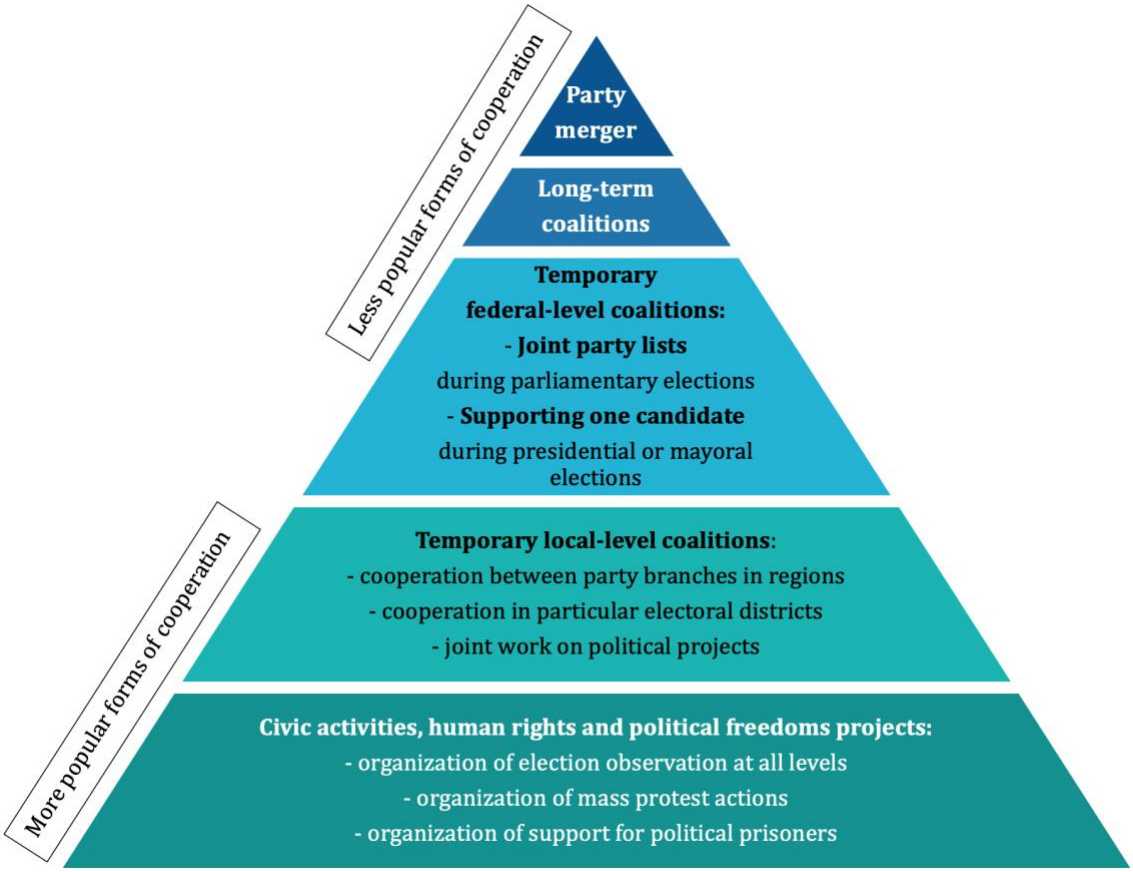
6.2 Cooperation trends

Not all forms of inter-party cooperation were equally unpopular among the interviewed activists and local leaders. Interviewees expressed contrasting attitudes towards different forms of cooperation, outlined in the diagram below (figure 6.1). Most of them were ready to cooperate with a wide range of opposition forces (including some systemic parties) on various civic projects, such as the organisation of election observation at various levels or the organisation of mass protest actions aiming to promote basic political freedoms and human rights. Many interviewees were also willing to cooperate with activists from various parties at the local level, including temporary coalitions during regional or municipal elections or joint work on political projects, where resources of individual opposition parties proved insufficient to accomplish their set goals. Similarly, most interviewees acknowledged the need to achieve stand-down agreements in majoritarian districts to avoid intra-opposition competition and the splitting of the opposition vote. Fewer interviewees were willing to engage in electoral coalitions at the federal level that required negotiations between party leaders, including the formation of joint party lists during parliamentary elections. They also described the endorsement of a single presidential candidate as an unrealistic goal due to the presidential ambitions of several party leaders. Very few respondents expressed a willingness to build long-term coalitions within the opposition or initiate merger negotiations.

Interviewed opposition activists tended to favour temporary, flexible cooperation over longer-term agreements or permanent unions. They were also more optimistic about informal coalitions that did not require negotiations between the federal-level leaders. In their view, spontaneous cooperation proved its greater effectiveness, compared to formal opposition coalitions. Examples included the Moscow mayoral election in 2013, when

activists with diverse party affiliations supported Alexey Navalny's campaign without any formal inter-party agreements, and the 2017 Moscow municipal election when different support structures for municipal candidates complemented each other and avoided competition. However, attempts to formalise and structure opposition unions largely proved unsuccessful, which is analysed in the previous chapters.

Figure 6.1 Diagram: Attitudes towards different forms of inter-party cooperation



Several interviewees attributed the success of the 2017 Moscow municipal campaign to the informal alliance between participating political forces and individual candidates, which appeared to be more beneficial than traditional electoral coalitions formed by the party leaders. Three separate support systems for opposition candidates emerged, working in parallel – organised by Dmitry Gudkov and Maxim Katz in cooperation with Yabloko, by a local politician Yuliya Galiamina ("School for municipal deputies") and by Open Russia. A 5th of December Party member (interviewee 5) concluded that the organisers avoided wasting energy on formal attempts to unite around a single political platform and instead, focused on providing support to local candidates (appendix 6.1). In his view, their parallel work towards the same goal (electing opposition representatives

and gaining the majority in some municipal districts), while avoiding conflicts or interference with each other's campaign efforts, was sufficient to achieve good electoral results. He noted that this decentralised structure was beneficial for the candidates, who had the opportunity to choose between the three support systems. Another member of the 5th of December Party (interviewee 2), who planned to run for election in 2017, reported that candidates could easily reach agreements with each other regarding the allocation of districts. He mentioned his decision to withdraw his candidacy at the request of another candidate supported by Gudkov-Katz team, who offered their assistance with signature collection in an alternative district.

A member of Alexey Navalny's team (interviewee 4) explained that conflicts during elections generally arose in relation to candidates, who had no connection to their chosen electoral districts. For example, he mentioned that during the 2014 Moscow City Duma election the leader of DemVybor Vladimir Milov refused to endorse Yabloko's candidate in his district due to his poor knowledge of the area. Instead, he supported a candidate from the parliamentary party Just Russia, who started his political activities there well in advance of the election.

As multiple interviewees observed, during local-level elections the involvement of federal-level leaders often appeared to be counter-productive since it created unnecessary conflicts and shifted the focus away from the actual campaign activities. One of them (interviewee 4) argued that the attempt to form an electoral coalition prior to the aforementioned 2014 election was largely unsuccessful because too much attention was drawn to formal negotiations and coalition events. At the same time, as he noted, local candidates "who worked on the ground" could easily reach agreements with each other (appendix 6.1). He insisted that the existing division was not along partisan lines but rather, between politicians who maintained effective political activities within their districts and ineffective party bureaucrats who were more interested in competing for internal positions instead of campaigning.

A Yabloko member (interviewee 14), who participated in the 2017 Moscow municipal campaign, expressed a similar view (appendix 6.1). He mentioned the ineffectiveness of Yabloko's central campaign office, compared to campaigns of individual candidates and the Gudkov-Katz support system. The interviewee also complained about the interference of this central office with the work of local campaign teams. Yabloko members (interviewees 14 and 17) reported similar issues during the Moscow City Duma campaign in 2019. According to their observations, Yabloko's central campaign team produced minimal outputs, considering their significant resources

(appendix 6.1). As interviewee 14 mentioned, some Yabloko candidates refused the support offered by the central office due to the latter's mismanagement and inefficiency, including the investment of resources in the recruitment of new party members instead of campaign activities.

6.3 Disadvantages of a party merger

As reported by the interviewees, a number of potential party mergers had been discussed during the analysed period in the form of internal debates between party members, proposals made by some party leaders or preliminary negotiations. The following mergers were considered: between Parnas and the Progress Party, the Progress Party and DemVybor, the 5th of December Party and Parnas, the Progress Party and the 5th of December Party, the Libertarian Party and Civic Initiative, Yabloko and Parnas. However, these negotiations ended at an early stage and all initial proposals were declined. In the case of merger negotiations between the 5th of December Party and Parnas, there was a vote held within the former party on this issue: the majority of voters rejected the merger proposal, which resulted in the decision of some members to leave the 5th of December Party and join Parnas on an individual basis. The case of RPR-Parnas was the only completed merger within the opposition movement during the analysed period.

The majority of interviewees either did not support the idea of a merger between opposition parties or described implementing mergers as unfeasible. The primary objections to party mergers were related to the potential loss of a party's competitive advantages and reputational damage as a result of merging with some opposition parties – these barriers are explored in the previous chapter (chapter 5, appendix 5.11). However, there were additional objections associated with the cost-benefit analysis, the unequal balance of power within the future merged party and the potential decrease in effectiveness of the involved teams. These disadvantages of mergers, expressed by the interviewees, are summarised in the table 6.2 below. Table 6.3 presents a list of frequently mentioned barriers to a merger, including the political ambitions of party leaders and the unwillingness of party members to compete for executive and leadership positions with members of other political forces.

Table 6.2

Disadvantages of a party merger within the opposition, according to interviewees
Potential loss of a party's unique identity or its competitive advantages, such as: • Decentralised structure and decision-making (5th of December Party) • Effective political campaigning (Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation) • The risk of losing party licenses as a result of a merger process (Yabloko and Parnas) • Distinct ideology (Libertarian Party) (a more detailed explanation is provided in appendix 5.11, section "strengths")
Unwillingness to merge with certain parties due to their negative points, including: • Ineffectiveness of their political activities due to poor management and other factors (Yabloko, Parnas, Civic Initiative) • Leader-centric structure and excessive dependence on specific personalities (Yabloko, Parnas, Civic Initiative, Progress Party) • Negative reputation due to associations with the era of 1990s and the opposition of the previous period (Yabloko, Parnas, Civic Initiative) • Alleged cooperation with the regime in various forms (Yabloko, Civic Initiative, DemVybor after the split) (a more detailed explanation is provided in appendix 5.11, section "weaknesses")
Cost-benefit analysis – uncertainty regarding the potential benefits of a merger: • Members of unregistered parties: acquiring a party license is not a guaranteed result of merging with a registered party, as it could be withdrawn at any time for political reasons • Members of registered parties: the anticipated risks involved in the merger process outweigh the possible benefits due to the lack of resources of most potential merger partners
Unequal balance of power and a distrust of potential merger partners: • Parties' unequal status in negotiations due to the unfair party registration process • Inability to reach an agreement regarding the political weight of each party

- Unregistered parties: the fear of being absorbed by a registered party
- Registered parties: the fear that the party could be captured from within by the incoming activists and leaders

Potential decrease in effectiveness

- A merger could potentially decrease the effectiveness of member parties, compared to their individual outputs pre-merger, due to organisational challenges and leadership incompatibilities that could cause conflicts

The presence of alternative forms of cooperation

- It is more efficient to unite resources and cooperate without merging – in the form of joint work on particular political projects or election campaigns

Additional factors:

- A network of minor organisations has a greater chance of survival within an undemocratic environment, compared to larger parties
- The need to preserve multiple platforms for candidate nomination

Table 6.3

The main barriers to a party merger
• A merger would be impossible to implement due to the desire of party leaders to hold on to their posts and the unwillingness of party members to compete for executive positions with members of other parties
Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"This idea [of a party merger] is completely unrealistic because today's parties – unfortunately, they are not based on political views but on leadership ambitions."* ***Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor):*** *"...some people are simply not ready to give up their leadership posts, to lose their position [within the party]."* ***Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement):*** *"But the main problem is that it would be impossible to reach an agreement regarding the leadership of the [merged] party...this is not just the issue of leaders' political ambitions, the whole party establishment would not agree to this, as they would also end up being sidelined."*

- The inability of ordinary party members to influence decision-making within their parties (it is less costly for them to switch parties, as opposed to promoting the idea of a merger)

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"...many activists, perhaps, would be ready to unite parties but because this is not happening, they simply decide to switch parties – join those parties where they see something interesting going on."*

6.3.1 Uncertainty regarding the potential benefits of a merger

Interviewees with different party affiliations expressed doubts regarding the potential benefits of a merger between opposition parties. Some members of Yabloko and Parnas argued that smaller unregistered parties (such as the 5th of December Party, DemVybor or the Libertarian Party) lacked resources and therefore, did not constitute attractive merger partners. In their view, such a union would not be worth the amount of effort involved in the integration process (appendix 6.2). Members of the Progress Party, similarly, highlighted the lack of a clear organisational structure within the 5th of December Party and their low membership numbers, concluding that it could not be considered a proper political party. At the same time, they welcomed further cooperation with its members on an individual basis. Members of unregistered parties believed that an alliance with a registered party did not necessarily guarantee them a party license in the long-term, considering that it could be withdrawn at any time for political reasons (appendix 6.2). Both members of registered and unregistered parties, who opposed the idea of a merger, concluded that the anticipated risks involved in the process of merging party organisations outweighed the possible benefits.

In addition, one interviewee (10) noted that a merger between opposition parties did not necessarily imply a combination of their resources, as certain resources were already shared by all non-systemic forces, including the volunteer force. As he explained, during electoral periods parties generally recruited people from the same pool of volunteers, who worked for different opposition candidates at various times. This happened due to parties' low official membership numbers, which led to their reliance on a larger base of supporters and non-partisan activists.

6.3.2 Power imbalance

Another category of possible disadvantages of party mergers, mentioned by the interviewees, was related to parties' unequal status in the negotiation process and the

potential power imbalance arising from it. Merger negotiations were complicated by a lack of mutual agreement regarding the political weight of different opposition parties that could determine the number of their representatives in the governing bodies of a united party. As described in the previous chapter, the understanding of what made an opposition party successful varied, depending on the interviewees' party affiliation. For example, Yabloko members highlighted their recent electoral successes in Moscow, members of the Progress Party emphasised the strong public support for their leader, organisational capabilities of their leadership team and successful federal-level campaigns, whereas the 5th of December Party members mentioned the effectiveness of their local-level politics.

Some interviewees perceived the privileged position of registered parties in negotiations as an unfair advantage due to the unfair nature of the party registration process (appendix 6.3). In their view, the registered status of an opposition party was not a reflection of its greater political achievements: on the contrary, opposition forces with the greatest potential for political success were more likely to be denied registration. According to these interviewees, this issue created a division between the parties that had real political weight (in terms of their volunteer numbers or fundraising potential) and others, whose political significance was centred around the possession of a party license.

Moreover, several interviewees highlighted the issue of party license appropriation by specific party leaders (such as Grigory Yavlinsky, Mikhail Kasyanov or Andrey Nechayev), who maintained control over their parties for a prolonged period of time and used the registered status of their parties as a bargaining tool during coalition negotiations in order to advance their personal political careers (appendix 6.3). For example, a Parnas member (interviewee 6) mentioned the nomination of Grigory Yavlinsky for the presidential election as an essential condition of uniting with Yabloko, put forward by the party. Other interviewees criticised Andrey Nechayev, who in their view, enjoyed unmerited bargaining power due to the registered status of his party Civic Initiative, which had no human, organisational or financial resources. Parnas was criticised in a similar way: as a former Progress Party member (interviewee 12) noted, by the time a potential merger appeared on the agenda, Parnas lacked any significant resources, apart from its party license, which was controlled by the Parnas leadership (appendix 6.3). Other interviewees criticised Parnas within the context of the Democratic Coalition during the 2016 parliamentary election, highlighting the party's reluctance to share its license without some personal benefits for their leader.

Some members of the aforementioned parties disagreed with this critique. For example, one of the Yabloko members (interviewee 16) argued that Yabloko's lengthy existence was largely a result of Grigory Yavlinky's personal efforts, who consistently managed to attract sufficient funds into the party in order to sustain functioning regional branches and regular electoral participation. A Parnas member (interviewee 6) noted that Parnas, unlike other opposition parties, had always been a proponent of coalition agreements and offered inter-party cooperation in various forms, including the nomination of Alexey Navalny for the 2013 mayoral election, the electoral coalition in 2015-2016 and attempts to negotiate a merger with Yabloko and the 5th of December Party. He attributed the division during the 2016 parliamentary campaign to Alexey Navalny's leadership ambitions, rather than Mikhail Kasyanov's. A member of Civic Initiative (interviewee 13) emphasised that Andrey Nechayev gave up his leadership position after the party's alliance with two well-known politicians: Dmitry Gudkov and Kseniya Sobchak – an attempt to improve the image of the party and attract new activists.

One of the anticipated risks of party mergers, reported by members of smaller unregistered parties, referred to the threat of being absorbed by the merger partner and the inability to influence the political agenda of the future united party (appendix 6.4). This was related to their weaker position in negotiations and the consequent secondary status within the merged party: a merger with a registered party would imply an integration of their members into that party, which would place them at a disadvantage. In addition, some activists expressed concerns regarding the leader-centric structure of certain opposition parties, where ordinary members had little involvement in strategic decision-making. Multiple interviewees were deterred by the lack of proper democratic mechanisms within parties, such as Yabloko and Parnas, which prevented the replacement of unpopular party leaders.

According to some interviewees, members of registered parties feared that their well-established party structures could be hijacked by an organised group of incoming activists and leaders with their own political agenda. As they noted, uniting with Alexey Navalny was particularly problematic, as any structure with his participation would be dominated by Navalny and his team due to his disproportionately high level of popular support, media presence and organisational resources, compared to other party leaders (appendix 6.5).

Two interviewees (1 and 14) observed that the merger of Maxim Katz's team with the Moscow branch of Yabloko demonstrated several problems that can occur when activist groups and well-established, registered parties attempt to form alliances. The relationship

between Yabloko's establishment and the incoming members was confrontational from the beginning. The idea of accepting several hundred new members at once was met with resistance within the party. The leader of the Moscow branch Sergey Mitrokhin described them as an organised group pursuing their own political goals, which differed from those of Yabloko. The new members, in turn, accused the Moscow party leadership of blocking internal elections for fear of being replaced by more popular candidates. Although Yabloko achieved significant gains during the 2017 Moscow municipal election largely due to the efforts of Maxim Katz and Dmitry Gudkov, the relationship between the two intra-party groups remained competitive, rather than cooperative. One side argued that the party needed a renewal through the acceptance of younger activists that were more politically dynamic, capable of self-organisation and effective in managing election campaigns, whereas the opposing side claimed that the new group resembled a cult, as they were not acting independently but following the directives issued by Maxim Katz.

Yabloko's poor record of coalition-building deterred other opposition members from initiating merger negotiations with the party. Many interviewees viewed Yabloko as incapable of engaging in coalitions with other political forces, considering its well-established reputation as a stand-alone party and past difficulties in reaching any electoral agreements with Yabloko's participation (appendix 5.11). For example, a Parnas member (interviewee 6) criticised Yabloko for making inherently unrealistic proposals, which devalued any negotiation efforts.

6.3.3 Potential decrease in effectiveness

The potential decrease in the effectiveness of merging teams presented another significant concern for activists opposed to party mergers within the opposition. A Progress Party member (interviewee 8) compared the idea of a party merger with the Moscow programme of enlarging schools and hospitals by consolidating several schools/hospitals into one, which was widely criticised due to the fear that uniting successful organisations with less successful ones would result in an overall decline in performance (Meduza 2014). In the case of a potential merger between opposition parties, the interviewee, similarly, expected the integration process to interfere with the productivity of the involved teams (appendix 6.6). As he predicted, their current individual outputs, however small, would be completely diminished as a result of a unification. Other interviewees predicted conflicts and factionalism within a merged party due to personal incompatibilities, disagreements regarding organisational strategy and other factors that could lead to divisions.

Members of unregistered parties named the ineffectiveness of party leadership among the primary reasons behind their unwillingness to unite with Yabloko and Parnas. As some of them noted, these parties demonstrated their inability to reform and a merger with another political entity was unlikely to improve the internal situation. In their view, the enthusiasm of activist teams and their political initiative would be suppressed by the cumbersome bureaucratic structures of the "old" democratic parties. Therefore, they concluded, a merger with them would only create unnecessary barriers for activists' political activities. One interviewee (4) argued that politicians of the previous generation were more interested in competing over internal party positions than participating in real political activities. In particular, the critics of Yabloko and Parnas highlighted the ineffectiveness of their federal-level campaigns, including the 2018 presidential campaign of Grigory Yavlinsky and the parliamentary campaign of Parnas in 2016. Some interviewees acknowledged the recent electoral successes of Yabloko at the local level and the presence of several strong regional branches but attributed these achievements to the efforts of local activists and a group of new party members in Moscow.

Many interviewees argued that inter-party cooperation in forms other than a merger was more beneficial: this included collaboration on specific political projects and tactical electoral cooperation – such as agreements on the allocation of majoritarian districts or providing support to a particular candidate during elections (appendix 6.6). They concluded that most of their political goals could be achieved without forcing opposition members into one party or engaging in long-term alliances. Activists were disillusioned by the previous negative experience of coalition-building: as one interviewee (4) observed, formal inter-party agreements and coalition talks between party leaders rarely brought any significant political gains.

6.3.4 Other factors

Several interviewees highlighted additional benefits of preserving the diversity of political forces within the opposition. For example, interviewees 8 and 9 claimed that a network of minor political organisations had a better chance of survival in an undemocratic environment, compared to a larger opposition party, which could be easily destroyed by the regime. Moreover, activists valued the ability to switch between parties relatively easily, considering a lack of internal democratic mechanisms within some opposition parties. A former member of the Progress Party (interviewee 9) also highlighted the importance of maintaining multiple platforms for candidate nomination, considering the practice of some parties blocking the nomination of certain politicians

due to inter-personal conflicts with the party leaders. As he argued, in order to avoid unreasonable demands put forward by certain parties (resulting in high nomination costs for individual candidates), it was essential to maintain party pluralism and prevent the monopolization of opposition politics by a single political force. In his view, competition between opposition parties stimulated their development and provided alternatives for candidates and other opposition members.

Another interviewee (5) noted that over time each of the opposition groups found its own niche within the opposition movement: various political parties, organisations and movements performed different functions, had different short-term goals and focused on different political aspects. For example, some groups focused on the organisation of street protests, others specialised in holding local election campaigns or organising election observation. In his opinion, it was reasonable for the Solidarity movement to remain independent in order to unite people who were willing to participate in opposition activities but had little interest in partisan politics or election campaigns.

6.4 Barriers to a merger

Several interviewees supported a merger between some opposition parties, however, they agreed with the critics of this idea about the difficulty (or impossibility) of its implementation. The most commonly named difficulties (table 6.3 above) were associated with the ambitions of party leaders and their unwillingness to compete with other politicians for leadership positions and influence within the united party. In the case of Yabloko, which could sustain more executive positions than other parties, interviewees also expected resistance among the party executives.

At the same time, as multiple interviewees noted, there were few barriers to a merger at the activist level. According to their observations, most opposition parties maintained successful cooperation at the grassroots level, with some small regional branches operating as a single party (appendix 6.7). Although each opposition party had a core membership, consisting of loyal activists, partisanship did not play an important role for the majority of opposition members. As some interviewees concluded, from the perspective of an average opposition member, the line between different opposition parties was often blurred and party membership did not have a significant impact on their political activities. One interviewee (17) observed that regional activists frequently participated in the activities of multiple political forces at the same time. Yabloko was the only political party that formally prohibited its members from engaging in the

activities of other political organisations. However, other opposition forces avoided imposing similar restrictions, which facilitated inter-party cooperation among activists.

A Progress Party member (interviewee 8) explained that regional activist teams needed to cooperate with each other because of the limited resources at their disposal. For example, during the 2018 presidential campaign regional teams of various opposition forces were united, while their Moscow-based leaders were engaged in major conflicts with each other (appendix 6.7). Other interviewees mentioned that local politicians also tended to cooperate or at least avoid direct competition, regardless of their party affiliation. A former member of the Progress Party (interviewee 1) argued that partisan politics was of little importance to municipal deputies: as she noted, candidates often treated parties as platforms for nomination and in some cases, as a tool to avoid costly signature collection procedures.

Political ambitions of party leaders were named among the primary barriers to inter-party cooperation, including party mergers. For example, several respondents pointed towards Alexey Navalny's inability to work within a coalition, which they attributed to his ambition to be the sole opposition leader (appendix 6.8). A member of Parnas (interviewee 6) criticised Alexey Navalny for his withdrawal from the Democratic Coalition during the 2016 parliamentary campaign and his refusal to support the Parnas party list, as had been previously agreed. Similarly, some members of the Progress Party criticised Navalny's strategy of undermining other political leaders within the opposition. In part, this referred to one of Leonid Volkov's interviews, where he claimed that Navalny's organisation was the only significant opposition force in Russia (Kanygin 2018):

> …we understand that the objective situation in the Russian political space is black and white at the moment, we are alone, and it would be much easier for us to carry our burden if there were other powerful political forces. But they don't exist. There is this scorched field and only us. This makes our moral responsibility enormous and makes our work particularly hard because we understand that there are great expectations associated with us.

While many Navalny supporters agreed with this message, some noted that Volkov's rhetoric of uniqueness and superiority was counter-productive, as it created unnecessary barriers for cooperation with other politicians. One of the Progress Party members (interviewee 8) criticised Alexey Navalny for refusing to support political projects where he did not play the central role, which he interpreted as Navalny's fear of strengthening

his intra-opposition opponents. Interviewee 8 described it as a strategy of "clearing the opposition political arena" (appendix 6.8). Another interviewee (9) expressed a similar critique in relation to the 2014 Moscow City Duma campaign, when Alexey Navalny and Leonid Volkov advised to ignore unfair elections when their allies were denied registration and did not actively support the remaining candidates (Navalny 2014b; 2014c; Volkov 2014a; 2014b). A Progress Party member (interviewee 10) noted that coalition-building with Navalny's participation was problematic due to his disproportionately large political weight and the ability to suppress other coalition members (appendix 6.8).

Other party leaders (in particular, Mikhail Kasyanov and Grigory Yavlinsky) were also criticised for their political ambitions that prevented coalition agreements and permanent alliances. A member of Solidarity (interviewee 11) mentioned that negotiations with Parnas became more difficult after the loss of Boris Nemtsov, who played the role of connector between different opposition forces. In her view, Nemtsov, unlike Kasyanov, had the ability to overcome his political ambitions and was willing to participate in political projects that did not benefit him personally, such as the Opposition Coordination Council or the 2013 Moscow mayoral election, when he endorsed Alexey Navalny's candidacy. Other interviewees (1, 5, 12) also argued that the primary barrier to a union between unregistered parties (5th of December Party, Progress Party) and Parnas was Mikhail Kasyanov's status as the permanent party leader and his reluctance to share power.

6.5 Conclusion

Despite frequent conflicts between opposition leaders and their reluctance to cooperate with each other, their political organisations tended to maintain connections at the grassroots level. At the same time, most partisan activists rejected the idea of a merger between opposition parties. After previous unsuccessful coalition-building attempts, activists developed a negative attitude towards formal coalition agreements with participation of federal party leaders, which in their view, distracted from real work on the ground and caused unnecessary conflicts. A lack of internal democratic mechanisms and the inability of ordinary members to influence crucial strategic decisions of their parties presented an additional barrier to coalition-building. It was often easier for party members to switch parties than to promote the idea of a merger or other potential improvements.

The tendency to build Russian parties around specific personalities also served as a significant barrier to mergers. Many interviewees highlighted the desire of party leaders to preserve their leadership positions, as well as their presidential ambitions and unwillingness to compete with other politicians for the presidential nomination, which would be inevitable in the case of a merger. As could be seen from the case of Parnas (chapter 3), opposition parties were unable to manage internal competition for candidate nomination. Despite the declared intention to hold presidential primaries, most Parnas leaders refused to organise them in 2011. This led to one of the party co-chairs with presidential ambitions, Vladimir Milov, leaving Parnas and establishing an independent political party DemVybor.

A merger with the Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation was particularly challenging due to the high personal popularity of Alexey Navalny that leaders of other parties could not compete with, which deterred them from considering such an alliance. Only those politicians, who accepted Alexey Navalny as the main opposition leader (including Vladimir Milov after 2015 and Ilya Yashin after 2016), successfully cooperated with the Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Fragmentation of the democratic opposition movement in Russia is a well-known phenomenon that is commonly discussed and recognised as a significant problem not only by outside observers but also by some opposition leaders. For example, opposition politician Maxim Katz recently reflected: "One of the main skills of the Putin system – forcing its opponents to work to its benefit. This worked for many years within the Russian opposition. Instead of fighting against Putin during elections, the opposition during every [electoral] cycle was fighting against each other" (Katz 2022).

Intra-opposition divisions were particularly damaging during electoral periods, as they led to competing opposition candidates or party lists on the ballot and prevented consolidation of the opposition vote. This resulted in the inability to elect individual opposition representatives or overcome the parliamentary entry threshold. Moreover, the failure of opposition leaders to unite in electoral coalitions or their exit from such coalitions demotivated potential volunteer canvassers, hampered mobilisation of the opposition electorate and the recruitment of election observers required to detect and document electoral fraud. In addition, clashes between opposition politicians often made it more difficult to organise mass protests against unfair elections because opposition's electoral failures could partly be attributed to the inability of its members to unite forces.

At the start of the analysed period (early 2010s) there was an impression within the opposition community that the primary barrier to their electoral success was the absence of a registered political party that would be fully independent from the regime and, unlike Yabloko, willing to nominate diverse opposition politicians. Later several opposition parties were successfully registered (Parnas, DemVybor and Civic Initiative) but none of them became a uniting force for diverse opposition groups in the long-term. Parnas aspired to become such a party but experienced several splits and deterred its allies from further cooperation after the unsuccessful parliamentary campaign in 2016. Moreover, unregistered opposition parties (Progress Party, 5th of December Party, Libertarian Party) were unwilling to merge with their registered counterparts.

The issue of opposition fragmentation was not a unique feature of Putin's era: during *perestroika* early democratic parties struggled to create a broad anti-communist coalition and during Yel'tsin's terms the liberal economic bloc and Yabloko failed establish a reformist alliance. The increasingly authoritarian nature of the Russian regime during the Putin period created additional incentives for opposition parties to form an anti-regime coalition. There were multiple attempts to unite anti-regime forces throughout the period analysed in this work, however, formal opposition coalitions proved to be short-lived.

There were a number of external factors that contributed to divisions within the opposition, which are typical for undemocratic political environments and are well described in the literature on the topic (Lust-Okar 2004; Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). The central role of presidency in the Russian political system discouraged parties from engaging in electoral coalitions or merging, as party leaders with presidential ambitions were unwilling to compete with other opposition politicians for the presidential nomination. Strong presidency, in combination with an underdeveloped party system, led to leader-centric party politics, with parties organised around specific personalities, rather than political platforms. Politicians with presidential ambitions tended to establish independent political parties, instead of engaging in competition within the existing ones, which led to the oversupply of liberal-democratic parties. The divide-and rule strategy of the Russian political elite also contributed to opposition fragmentation. Putin's regime successfully divided not only systemic and non-systemic opposition but in addition, triggered divisions within the non-systemic group of political forces. The tools that were used included granting some non-systemic political parties formal registration and denying it to others or allowing some independent politicians to participate in elections, while excluding others. Contrary to the findings of Jennifer Gandhi and Ora John Reuter (2013), according to which the presence of a long-lasting opposition party makes legislative electoral coalitions more likely, in Russia the presence of such a party only interfered with coalition-building. The oldest Russian opposition party Yabloko adopted a policy of non-engagement in opposition alliances and consistently prioritised the interests of its politicians over opposition's goals. For example, prior to the 2016 parliamentary election Yabloko refused to negotiate with the Democratic Coalition and nominated an alternative party list, which split the opposition vote.

This research aimed to explore the fragmentation of the Russian opposition in more depth, going beyond the well-studied external factors and focusing on internal causes of division. Some of these internal causes, outlined in my work, were related to the aforementioned external factors. For example, a lack of proper democratic mechanisms within opposition parties was connected to the strong presidency in Russia and the consequent personalistic party politics. However, it was important to analyse internal factors separately, using specific cases of party splits and coalition breakdown, in order to gain a better understanding of why the issue of intra-opposition divisions was so difficult to overcome, despite the development of the Russian opposition movement over the course of the 2010s. An additional goal of this study was to look below the surface and explore the issue from the perspective of ordinary party activists, whose attitudes

towards inter-party cooperation often differed from those of federal-level leaders. Opinions of regular opposition members were rarely reflected in the press or other open sources, which generally focused on the statements of well-known political leaders. Interviews with opposition members conducted as part of my research allowed me to examine grassroots politics in Russia and discover certain trends related to relationships between parties at the activist level.

On the one hand, both the case study and the interview analysis pointed towards the same internal factors that contributed to divisions within the non-systemic opposition during the period between 2011 and 2019: disagreements regarding the balance of power within parties and coalitions, a distrust towards some opposition members, who were frequently accused of cooperation with the regime, ineffectiveness within opposition groups and a lack of proper democratic mechanisms that exacerbated the problem of leaders' political ambitions. On the other hand, in-depth interviews with activists from different political parties yielded additional findings that were not reflected in the case study. Interviewees highlighted successful inter-party cooperation at the grassroots level, which existed regardless of conflicts between party leaders, and expressed their willingness to cooperate with a broad range of political forces on specific political projects and election campaigns.

Many interviewees emphasised that the primary causes of division within the opposition were not associated with ideological disagreements, despite the fact that the opposition movement included members with vastly different ideological positions. Although some interviewees criticised Alexey Navalny for his ideological inconsistency, they did not name it among the barriers for joining his party; rather, their decision to join a specific party was determined by other factors, such as the effectiveness of partisan political activities. Most opposition parties struggled to maintain a distinct ideological profile, as they were interested in attracting diverse opposition members. Moreover, they tended to focus on promoting basic political freedoms and human rights, rather than campaigning for the implementation of specific policy proposals. The case study also confirmed this finding. Despite the negative attitude of some opposition members towards politicians expressing overly radical views (this included proposals by the nationalist faction within the Coordination Council, nationalistic statements of Alexey Navalny and Vyacheslav Mal'tsev's populist rhetoric), ideological disagreements only served as a contributory factor, as opposed to being the primary cause of division. Other internal factors, however, had a more significant effect on cooperation between opposition forces.

The vast majority of respondents outlined the political ambitions of party leaders among the primary causes of division within the Russian opposition in the 2010s. Although the ambitions of politicians affect inter-party cooperation in all political systems, in underdeveloped party systems, such as the Russian, these ambitions are not managed through internal democratic mechanisms that are supposed to facilitate fair competition for leadership positions within parties and for candidate nomination. Despite multiple attempts to democratise opposition politics (examples include various attempts to introduce primaries as a tool for candidate selection), party politics at the federal level largely remained personalistic and paternalistic. Parties tended to be organised around specific personalities and ordinary members were generally excluded from strategic decision-making.

Excessive centralisation of decision-making often led to inefficiencies and poor political decisions, as the party leadership was detached from activists on the ground, their needs and demands. For example, in 2011 the leaders of Parnas failed to acknowledge the popularity of Alexey Navalny's protest voting strategy among activists, which decreased the level of support for the party within the opposition community. Similarly, in 2016 the Parnas leadership lobbied the nomination of unpopular Mikhail Kasyanov as the head of the party list bypassing primaries, despite the reluctance of activists to campaign for Kasyanov.

The Yabloko leadership consistently excluded promising politicians from the party, who were not loyal to Grigory Yavlinsky and his allies. Examples included Alexey Navalny, Ilya Yashin and Maxim Katz, who were all excluded from Yabloko under various pretexts, whereas the most likely reason for their exclusion was the threat to Yavlinsky's long-lasting leadership. Interviewed Yabloko members complained that the central party apparatus was highly ineffective during local-level elections because its members had little understanding of the activities and needs of local campaign teams. Attempts to democratise the candidate selection process within Yabloko did not yield any positive results. In 2018 the party held an internal primary election to select a Moscow mayoral candidate, however, its winner Yakov Yakubovich withdrew his candidacy in favour of the long-standing leader of the Moscow Yabloko branch Sergey Mitrokhin. One of the interviewed Yabloko members suggested that Yakubovich made this decision due to the pressure against him from Mitrokhin's team and potential conflicts. These issues followed Yabloko throughout the party's existence. As described in chapter 2, attempts to change the party's internal policies and electoral strategy in order to improve its electoral prospects often led to the exclusion of intra-party reformers, if their actions did

not align with the interests of Grigory Yavlinsky and his team (Hale 2004). In addition, Yabloko's parliamentary campaigns were focused primarily on the promotion of Grigory Yavlinsky, with little effort made to support regional party leaders. Yabloko's inability to select a more popular presidential candidate or endorse an external opposition candidate with greater public support also contributed to the party's negative image and political isolation.

Some members of Alexey Navalny's party criticised their chairman for his ambition to remain the sole leader of the Russian opposition, which interfered with the establishment of inter-party alliances involving multiple political leaders. Moreover, Progress Party members realised that their political party was treated by its leaders merely as one of the projects of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which was gradually phased out without much consideration for the opinion of ordinary party members. After Navalny's presidential campaign (2017-2018) the party was effectively replaced by a network of Team Navalny regional units. Although these units were considered more effective than the regional party branches in terms of campaigning and implementing various political projects, the system lacked many important characteristics of a party. The development of properly functioning political parties contributes to more successful opposition politics in the long-term, as parties tend to have a stable membership base and facilitate the emergence and growth of new political leaders at various levels, whereas other types of political organisations (as well as leader-centric parties, such as the Progress Party) often produce experienced volunteer canvassers and campaign workers, rather than politicians.

Personalistic politics and a lack of effective democratic mechanisms within parties contributed to opposition fragmentation in a number of ways. These factors led to the emergence of too many liberal-democratic parties, as politicians with presidential ambitions strived to establish their own parties and maintain control over decision-making at the federal level. There were also party splits, as promising politicians and their allies tended to leave parties where they had no chance of competing for leadership positions. Most attempts to democratise party politics failed because democratic mechanisms were introduced by party leaders, as opposed to being activist-led. As a result, these mechanisms failed when the outcomes did not go in line with the interests of the party leadership. Moreover, alliances that did not benefit party leaders were unlikely to emerge. The lack of intra-party competition led to the ineffectiveness of many leadership teams, as inefficient and unpopular leaders could not be easily replaced. In particular, this referred to political parties Yabloko, Parnas and Civic Initiative, whose ineffectiveness at the federal level deterred other opposition members from cooperating

with them or led to the breakdown of coalitions with their participation. For example, the ineffectiveness of Parnas' leadership in terms of parliamentary campaign management played an important role in the dissolution of the Democratic Coalition in 2016.

At the same time, according to interviewees' responses, there was successful cooperation between most non-systemic forces at the grassroots level during the analysed period (2011-2019). For example, some interviewees reported effective electoral cooperation between candidates with different party affiliations during the 2017 Moscow municipal campaign. Others mentioned that small regional branches of various opposition parties often functioned as a single unit due to their insufficient resources. Interviewed activists tended to express a positive attitude towards inter-party cooperation on specific civic and political projects, collective support for local and regional opposition campaigns and other tactical alliances that did not require negotiations between party leaders. By contrast, most interviewees were unwilling to engage in federal-level electoral coalitions or consider party mergers due to the negative experience of such attempted coalition-building in the past. In their view, the desire of party leaders to preserve their positions presented an insurmountable barrier to any successful merger negotiations. Interviewees also observed that spontaneous cooperation proved to be more effective, compared to attempts to build strategic, longer-term alliances that involved complex negotiations. For example, during the 2013 Moscow mayoral election members of various opposition forces actively supported Alexey Navalny without any prior negotiations or formal agreements, which contributed to the success of his campaign. RPR-Parnas agreed to nominate Navalny as their candidate, but this agreement did not resemble a traditional electoral coalition: Navalny used the party as a platform for his nomination without any obligation to promote RPR-Parnas and the party leadership was not involved in Navalny's campaign management.

Apart from the factor of leaders' political ambitions, the difficulty of formal inter-party negotiations regarding electoral coalitions or mergers was associated with the inability to agree on a fair balance of power between the participating forces. It was difficult to assess the potential contribution of individual opposition parties within an undemocratic political environment, considering that some parties were excluded from the electoral process and therefore, were unable to demonstrate their electoral strength. Chapter 5 describes different strengths of opposition parties, as perceived by their members, which were challenging to compare during a negotiation process (summarised in appendix 5.11). For example, members of the Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation emphasised the effectiveness of their leadership team in terms of project and

campaign management (including strong federal-level campaigns), Yabloko members highlighted their stable party structure and some electoral successes in Moscow, while members of the 5th of December Party were proud of their strong local-level politics. Moreover, the registered status of some political parties guaranteed them a privileged position in negotiations, which was perceived as unfair by representatives of parties that were denied registration. Moreover, the 'Navalny factor' interfered with coalition-formation, as the high popularity of Alexey Navalny, compared to other opposition politicians, made any alliance with his participation unattractive for most party leaders. The inability to reach a consensus regarding the balance of power also played an important role in the breakdown of the merged RPR-Parnas party – the case that was described in chapter 3. The party lost an important faction (RPR) partly as a result of conflicts over its role in the party's decision-making. The leader of RPR Vladimir Ryzhkov argued that his faction deserved veto rights due to its significant contribution in the form of sharing its hard-earned party license with other merger members. Despite the initial intentions of all party leaders to follow the consensus principle when making important decisions, this policy was eventually abandoned in favour of the majority rule, as Vladimir Ryzhkov's position on various political issues was unpopular among the majority of Parnas members and the wider opposition community.

Finally, an additional obstacle to successful coalition-building within the non-systemic opposition was related to a distrust among its members and the exclusion of some political forces and politicians from coalition negotiations on the basis of their alleged cooperation with the regime. In some cases, this referred only to federal-level leaders and their teams, rather than political parties as a whole. For example, many interviewees viewed the Yabloko leadership as systemic or semi-systemic, while successfully cooperating with local Yabloko activists. Grigory Yavlinsky, Kseniya Sobchak, Andrey Nechayev and Vladimir Ryzhkov were frequently accused of making deals with the Presidential Administration throughout the 2010s. While it was challenging to verify the existence of such deals, these accusations appeared damaging for the opposition's goals, as they made any future cooperation with the aforementioned politicians or their political forces problematic. For example, labelling Yabloko as a systemic political force complicated negotiations with the party regarding the nomination of candidates from unregistered opposition parties. Moreover, the refusal of Yabloko to nominate strong opposition politicians could more easily be explained by the leadership ambitions of Yavlinsky's team and their unwillingness to promote opposition members, who could challenge their status within the party, rather than by Yabloko's covert

cooperation with the Kremlin. This assumption is confirmed by Yabloko's consistent policy of non-engagement in alliances, which the party's leader pursued even before Putin's presidencies. In the case of RPR-Parnas, described in chapter 3, similar accusations against Vladimir Ryzhkov and RPR led to their exit from the alliance and the impossibility of any further cooperation.

Making poor political decisions guided by self-interest does not always imply cooperation with the regime. Moreover, such accusations can appear counter-productive, as the exclusion of politicians from the opposition movement can push them towards considering cooperation with United Russia. There were some confirmed cases of opposition members switching sides and willing to be integrated into the regime. This includes the case of an SPS leader Nikita Belykh, who became governor of the Kirov region, contributing to the loss of SPS as an independent party. Another case involves Vitaly Serukanov, a former member of Navalny's team, who registered a new political party named the Progress Party, forcing the original Progress Party to change its name. However, the cumulative damage of these actions was not as significant as the atmosphere of suspicion that prevented the creation of broader opposition alliances.

There are some steps opposition members could take in order to overcome the issue of opposition fragmentation. One of the crucial measures is to work towards reforming leader-centric opposition parties by democratising and decentralising them. This implies the increased involvement of ordinary party members in strategic decision-making, which would create a better link between the leadership and activist levels, as well as between the Moscow and regional levels. The increased role of activists in the parties' decision-making could contribute to successful inter-party cooperation since such cooperation already exists at the activist level. There is a need for fairer and more transparent rules of intra-party competition for leadership positions and candidate nomination. This could facilitate regular leadership rotation, the removal of ineffective and unpopular party leaders and their replacement with stronger politicians and more competent, professionalised management teams. This process should not require the exclusion of former leaders from the party but rather, should motivate them to revise their approaches to politics and improve their political effectiveness in order to gain intra-party support in the future. As described in earlier chapters, the absence of proper democratic mechanisms within parties often led to the exit of promising politicians and their attempts to establish new parties, as they had little chance of realising their political ambitions within the existing ones. This happened, for example, in the case of Vladimir Milov and Leonid Volkov exiting Parnas. In addition, weak campaign management by Mikhail Kasyanov's

team during the 2016 parliamentary election and the subsequent poor electoral performance of Parnas should have led to a change in leadership. However, in the absence of functioning democratic mechanisms and a system of accountability, Kasyanov was re-elected as the party leader. This led to the exit of other leaders from the party and the unwillingness of most opposition forces to continue cooperation with Parnas.

Therefore, opposition members should aim to reduce the number of liberal-democratic parties competing for the same electorate, while increasing the level of competition within them. Chapter 5 highlights unique competitive advantages of different opposition parties, as perceived by their interviewed members, such as democratised decision-making (5th of December Party), effectiveness of the party leadership (Progress Party/Anti-Corruption Foundation) or a stable party structure (Yabloko). However, these advantages are not mutually exclusive and could be combined within one party. Sustaining a large number of independent opposition parties is an inefficient use of resources, as each party has to maintain a separate system of party executives and a network of regional branches. A reduction in the number of parties could be achieved without mergers, as members of various parties tend to naturally gravitate towards more successful parties, whereas the less successful ones could be eventually dissolved.

At the same time, successful party mergers are also possible if opposition members draw some lessons from the failures of the merged RPR-Parnas, described in chapter 3. Conflicts regarding the balance of power during the negotiation stage or after the unification could be resolved by focusing on the establishment of clear rules of intra-party competition and on the full integration of participating forces. Leaders of RPR-Parnas treated the party's governing bodies as a negotiation platform between the founding forces and their leaders. This led to the loss of many members, as a large proportion of them were not affiliated with any of the merging forces but joined what was promoted as a united opposition party. In well-established party systems, where parties have stable memberships, a quota system (guaranteed representation of all merger members in the party's governing bodies) can be a useful tool to convince negotiating forces to proceed with the merger and establish a fair balance of power between them. However, in Russia opposition parties have small memberships and tend to rely on a wider circle of opposition supporters, which is shared by all anti-regime forces. Therefore, members of the merging political forces could quickly become a minority within the new merged party.

In addition, it would be beneficial for the democratic movement to adopt a more inclusive approach and avoid discounting useful opposition members unnecessarily. Opposition should be interested in attracting more supporters and allies into their ranks,

rather than deterring people. The exclusionary approach, proposed by some members of Navalny's team (those who did not support Alexey Navalny during his campaigns do not belong to the real non-systemic opposition) appears counter-productive, as it prevents potentially beneficial cooperation between a wider circle of opposition forces. Alexey Navalny remains the most popular opposition politician in Russia, he deserved this status due to his establishment and effective management of the Anti-Corruption Foundation that investigated many cases of corruption among high-ranking Russian officials (including those related to Putin's personal wealth), his willingness to accept great personal risks and successful election campaigns. However, opposition members should not allow any single politician to monopolise the opposition political arena. The anti-regime movement is complex and consists of diverse groups, which contribute towards the opposition's goal of achieving democratisation in different ways. For example, a movement (White Counter) emerged with the sole purpose of tackling misinformation regarding the number of participants at various protest rallies, as its members were annoyed by the exaggerated numbers announced by opposition politicians.

Political activities of different opposition members and their approaches to politics may vary; the opposition movement benefits from this diversity and intra-opposition competition. However, internal competition should not lead to competing opposition candidates or party lists on the ballot. All-opposition primaries is a better tool to manage this competition, compared to inter-party negotiations, as it is generally easier to agree on the rules of internal elections than it is to agree on specific personalities.

Appendix

Appendix 1.1: Information about interviewees

Information about the interviewees was valid at the time interviews were conducted (2018-2019), later changes of the interviewees' party affiliations or their further political activities were not tracked and therefore, are not reflected in the thesis.

Interviewee 1: Former member of the Progress Party (also known as People's Alliance and Russia of the Future). During the period between 2011 and 2018 was an active participant of the Russian election observation movement (Golos and other organisations).

Interviewee 2: Member of the 5th of December Party and the movement Solidarity (*Solidarnost'*), former member of Parnas (earlier RPR-Parnas).

Interviewee 3: Former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor.

Interviewee 4: Former member of DemVybor, current member of Alexey Navalny's team.

Interviewee 5: Member of the 5th of December Party, participated in the activities of Open Russia.

Interviewee 6: Member of Parnas and the movement Solidarity.

Interviewee 7: Former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor.

Interviewee 8: Member of the Progress Party, active participant of the election observation movement.

Interviewee 9: Former member of the Progress Party and Alexey Navalny's team.

Interviewee 10: Member of the Progress Party and the movement Solidarity, active participant of the election observation movement and White Counter – the movement aimed at counting participants at opposition rallies in order to prevent disinformation.

Interviewee 11: Member of the movement Solidarity, former member of Parnas.

Interviewee 12: Former member of the Progress Party.

Interviewee 13: Member of Civic Initiative (also known as the Party of Change) since 2014.

Interviewee 14: Member of Yabloko, active member of the election observation movement.

Interviewee 15: Member of Maxim Katz's team, member of Yabloko.

Interviewee 16: Member of Yabloko.

Interviewee 17: Member of Maxim Katz's team, member of Yabloko, participated in the activities of Open Russia.

Interviewee 18: Member of the Libertarian Party.

Interviewee 19: Former supporter of the Progress Party and former member of Alexey Navalny's team, worked for the Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Appendix 1.2: General questionnaire

Introduction

- I would like to know a brief history of your involvement in the Russian opposition movement. When and how did you join the opposition movement? Which opposition parties were you a member of? Did you participate in the activities of any opposition movements or organisations? Did you participate in any election campaigns of opposition candidates?

Interviewee's political party

- How did you select your party of choice? What were your main criteria when choosing to join that party, as opposed to other existing opposition parties?
- (Where relevant) Why did you decide to participate in the establishment of a new political party, as opposed to joining the existing ones?
- What are the main competitive advantages of your party?
- Were ideological or policy preferences important or not when choosing a party to join?
- Why do you think new members join your party? For former members: Why do you think other people joined your party?
- (Where relevant) Why did you decide to switch parties?
- (Where relevant) Why did you decide to leave your party?
- Do you remember any internal divisions within your party? If so, what were the main causes?

Party mergers

- Would you support a merger between your party and another opposition party? If yes, which party? If not, why? What are the main disadvantages of a merger?
- What do you think in general about the idea of uniting unregistered parties with the registered? What are the main barriers to such mergers?

- What motivates unregistered parties to preserve their independent status?
- Are you aware of any merger negotiations between opposition parties, now or in the past?
- (Where relevant) Why were these negotiations unsuccessful?

Cooperation within the opposition movement

- Are there any political forces on the presented list that you would never cooperate with? Presented list of political forces: Anti-Corruption Foundation, Civic Initiative, DemVybor, Libertarian Party, Open Russia, Parnas (RPR-Parnas), Progress Party (People's Alliance/Russia of the Future), Solidarity, Yabloko, 5th of December Party. If so, why?
- Are there any opposition politicians that you would never cooperate with? If so, who and why?
- How would you assess the overall level of inter-group cooperation within the opposition? Is it sufficient or insufficient? Has it improved, decreased or remained the same over the course of last decade?
- Below is the list of opposition events and campaigns that I am interested in.

Anti-United Russia campaign and mass protests in 2011-2012
Establishment and activities of the Opposition Coordination Council
Moscow mayoral campaign in 2013
Moscow City Duma campaign in 2014
Regional election campaigns (Novosibirsk, Kaluga and Kostroma) in 2015
State Duma campaign in 2016
Moscow municipal campaign in 2017
Presidential campaign in 2018
Moscow mayoral campaign in 2018

Were there any cases of successful cooperation between opposition forces? If yes, what contributed to their success? What prevented successful cooperation in other

cases? (Where relevant) Why were these coalition-building attempts unsuccessful?

- Why did some broad opposition coalitions fall apart, including the Opposition Coordination Council and the Democratic Coalition?
- What are the main barriers to cooperation between opposition forces and the primary causes of division within the opposition? Below is the list of possible options, please select no more than 5 (the most significant ones), you can suggest your own.

Desire to preserve the unique identity of a party/organisation/movement
Reputational risks of uniting or cooperating with another political force
Ineffectiveness of political activities within political forces
Ideological incompatibilities
Different electoral bases
Different attitudes towards the regime
Different electoral strategies
Political ambitions of leaders
Different organisational strategies (including different approaches to internal management)
Political environment
A lack of political experience among party members or leaders
Institutional barriers
Other factors

- Could you provide some examples when the named factors prevented cooperation or led to divisions?

Appendix 3.1: Political party Parnas (RPR-Parnas)

Autumn 2010[10]	A coalition of democratic forces "For Russia Without Lawlessness and Corruption" was established by 4 political leaders: Mikhail Kasyanov (RNDS), Vladimir Milov (DemVybor), Boris Nemtsov (Solidarity) and Vladimir Ryzhkov (RPR).
December 2010[11]	A founding congress was held to establish a new political party Parnas (People's Freedom Party), which united 4 opposition forces: political movements RNDS, Solidarity and DemVybor and political party RPR, whose official registration was revoked in 2007.
May 2011[12]	Parnas submitted documents required for party registration.
June 2011[13]	Party was denied registration by the Ministry of Justice.
July 2011[14]	European Court of Human Rights ruled that the dissolution of RPR in 2007 was unjustified.
September 2011[15]	One of the party co-chairs Vladimir Milov left Parnas.
March 2012[16]	RPR's party registration was restored by the Ministry of Justice.
June 2012[17]	United forces officially merged into RPR, forming a registered political party RPR-Parnas, which could participate in elections.
February 2014[18]	One of the co-chairs Vladimir Ryzhkov left RPR-Parnas.

[10] https://lenta.ru/articles/2010/09/17/unity/

[11] https://www.dw.com/ru/российские-оппозиционеры-создадут-партию-народной-свободы/a-6324723; https://lenta.ru/news/2010/12/13/party/; https://parnasparty.ru/party/history

[12] https://graniru.org/Politics/Russia/Parties/m.188676.html

[13] https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2011/06/110622_parnas_registration_denial; https://www.rferl.org/a/russia_opposition_party_denied_registration/24242929.html

[14] https://www.themoscowtimes.com/archive/european-court-rebukes-law-on-parties; https://www.svoboda.org/a/24261617.html

[15] https://www.svoboda.org/a/24337998.html; https://demvybor.livejournal.com/158048.html

[16] https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2012/03/120316_republic_party_registration; https://www.dw.com/ru/республиканскую-партию-россии-восстановят-в-реестре-юрлиц/a-15813621

[17] https://www.dw.com/ru/республиканская-партия-россии-объединилась-с-парнасом/a-16031608

[18] https://echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/1254636-echo/; https://echo.msk.ru/programs/sorokina/1255690-echo/

Appendix 3.2: Interviewees about the unity around Alexey Navalny's mayoral campaign in 2013

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"Navalny's mayoral campaign, well, as I see it, there was a full consensus because absolutely everyone supported him. I cannot remember if anyone within the opposition was against Navalny during this election...Parnas nominated him, everyone else helped...There were members of the 5th of December Party, DemVybor, plenty of completely different people [working for his campaign]."*

Interviewee 12 (former member of the Progress Party): *[About Navalny's mayoral campaign in 2013] "The campaign undoubtedly turned out to be very successful. Among other things, it united everyone around one candidate."*

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change): *"...Of course, Yabloko was against Navalny, but by that time Yabloko was not a very credible structure...Everyone else supported Navalny's candidacy, the rest of the democratically-oriented civil society favoured Navalny, and even many communists...people with communist or socialist views, those with nationalist views – all supported Navalny as a candidate. Plus the liberal opposition."*

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"Well, I think practically everyone united around Navalny's campaign, although I remember that Mitrokhin was nominated by Yabloko, but the majority, a lot of people united and supported [Navalny's campaign].*

Interviewee 16 (member of Yabloko): *"...in 2013, yes, indeed, an interesting coalition of young people formed around Alexey Anatol'yevich [Navalny] – completely unexpectedly, no one expected it, including Aleksey Anatol'yevich himself – which did not form around Sergey Sergeyevich [Mitrokhin]...I followed his [Mitrokhin's] participation in debates, it is clear that his time is gone...he is not able to unite anyone around himself."*

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Navalny's mayoral campaign – well, it was really the only recent campaign of that kind, which was so successful, with a registered candidate, which united all of the opposition and attracted plenty of volunteers for the first time."*

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"Navalny's mayoral campaign, yes, I believe it was the best thing that happened during all these protest years...Back then I was a member of Yabloko, voted for Mitrokhin and campaigned for him, but I tried my best to discourage Yabloko from fighting against Navalny. At every [party] meeting I was telling Mitrokhin, and Mikhaleva, and everyone else: let's not do that [criticise Navalny], let's better criticise Sobyanin and work towards increasing the overall approval rating of the opposition. Actually, it was probably one of the reasons why I was excluded from the party."*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"Mayoral campaign of Alexey Navalny – great, in the end it united all active and*

efficient people...Navalny started working [with voters] and demonstrated a good result, gained a new audience and the more successful his campaign became, the more support he gathered."

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"I think that the mayoral campaign was very successful because many people united around it and participated in campaigning, and managed to select a single candidate."*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team):

"If you remember, he [Navalny] had no specific ideological platform…[his] campaign team consisted of left-wing people, right-wing, centrists, liberals, and all of them got along with each other under this non-ideological platform of Navalny. Think of even the campaign office in 2013 [the Moscow mayoral campaign]: I was in the legal support department, nationalists were sitting across from me, leftists – who only recently were members of the [far-left movement] Left Front – were sitting on the right. And these people somehow managed to work together and avoid conflicts."

"Alexey Navalny's mayoral campaign...It seems that everyone united within the non-systemic opposition…negotiations with Parnas were held, Parnas nominated Navalny and overall, it was a success...there were no problems with Parnas, all of the minor political forces, like the 5th of December Party and others – they also supported [Navalny's campaign]. So there were no disagreements and it was undoubtedly a positive case [of cooperation]. They did not reach an agreement with Yabloko, but no one has ever managed to reach an agreement with them."

Appendix 3.3: Alexey Navalny as a unifying and a divisive figure

- ***Navalny as a unifying figure:***

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Navalny's presidential campaign [2018] in particular united practically all of the political forces. For example, representatives of DemVybor came to work for his campaign – like I said, Vladimir Milov, who had previously positioned himself exclusively as a strong leader, he admitted that Navalny was a much stronger politician and he was saying it openly, without hiding…"*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *[About the 2018 presidential campaign] "Navalny started campaigning and gradually gained everyone's support. Then a 'spoiler' candidate appeared, backed by the Kremlin – Sobchak, but no one supported her...everyone united around Alexey Navalny's idea to abstain from participation in these elections, to declare an electoral strike, take to the streets and observe elections in order to demonstrate that [Putin's] victory was fraudulent."*

- ***Navalny as a divisive figure:***

Interviewee 6 (member of Parnas and the Solidarity movement): *"...some parties and*

some leaders of these parties proved their inability to reach agreements – Navalny, for example...he views himself as a single opposition leader and he is incapable of coming to an agreement with anyone at all."

Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor): *"Navalny, as I see it, has adopted a scorched earth policy, meaning that he is not willing to share his resources and popularity with anyone. He is ready to take someone else's popularity and combine it with his own, but he won't share his resources with others. Much like Putin is pursuing a scorched earth policy in the general Russian political arena, Navalny is doing the same within the opposition – 'if not me, then who?'."*

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"...Navalny, being one of the most powerful opposition members, at present is, in fact, in the process of...clearing the opposition political arena...many of his and his team's actions are aimed at confronting other opposition politicians or potential politicians, who target the same electorate."*

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement):

"Navalny enjoys such political weight that any cooperation [with him] can easily transform into 'ah, went under Navalny'..."

"Navalny's political weight stands out to such an extent that he will suppress everyone else [within the coalition] or will somehow interfere with communication among others, in my opinion."

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"...within Navalny's team – they have this sort of thing, how can I put it...Navalny's personality cult."*

Appendix 3.4: Examples of anti-Putin and anti-regime statements, criticised by RPR members

Boris Nemtsov:

- *"We have to free Russia from Putin."*[19]
- ***(January 2013)*** *"The fact is, Putin in principle cannot fight against corruption because Putin and corruption are synonymous. And stealing is the basis of the regime."*[20]
- ***(May 2013)*** *"They have two questions on their agenda. First question – how to hold on to power indefinitely? Second question – how to continue stealing indefinitely?...They are behaving like occupants."*[21]

[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoC8TVEU5sQ

[20] https://echo.msk.ru/programs/albac/989662-echo/

[21] https://echo.msk.ru/programs/year2013/1084940-echo/

- ***(September 2013)*** *"I think that our goal and our objective, together with Navalny and my other colleagues, is to free Russia from crooks and thieves."*[22]
- ***(September 2013)*** *"I simply think that we should act on all fronts. No one knows how we are going to dismantle this regime."*[23]
- ***(December 2013)*** *"We are heading in the direction of Lukashenko."*[24]

Mikhail Kasyanov:

- ***(February 2014)*** *"Sooner or later this regime will collapse."*[25]

Appendix 3.5: Interviewees' opinions regarding party licenses

- ***The importance of a party license***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *[About merging unregistered parties with registered] "I think that all these manipulations with party licenses will lead nowhere because if the authorities decide to prohibit participation in elections, they will do so regardless."*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"Party, in my opinion, is first and foremost, a group of like-minded people, who work together to achieve a common objective, and whether they have a license, like we had [in DemVybor] or don't have, like now [in Navalny's team] – it is completely irrelevant."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"I think that conflicts in many parties, like Parnas, intensify when they obtain a [party] license...or some legal resource, possession of which gives you an advantage."*

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change):

"It was important for me, even though I understood the strictness of party registration requirements, the registered status of the party was an important factor [when choosing a party to join]."

"Registration could be withdrawn from all parties, if there is a political will. What will stop Putin or the Ministry of Justice from withdrawing party licenses from all parties, including Yabloko, Parnas and everyone, who is registered and belongs to the opposition? Nothing will stop them."

[22] https://echo.msk.ru/programs/year2013/1156008-echo/

[23] https://echo.msk.ru/programs/year2013/1156008-echo/

[24] https://www.svoboda.org/a/25190089.html

[25] https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/1254484-echo/

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"I think in the current situation an officially registered party is a valuable resource that should be utilised – even if it's a bad party."*

Interviewee 16 (member of Yabloko): *"If you want to participate in politics, the legislation obliges you to be in a registered political party, in order to be elected…"*

- ***The issue of party license ownership:***

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"[About Civic Initiative/Party of Change] Nechayev's case, for example: he chairs some kind of party, which does not really exist, simply a registered something that has a party license, which he is constantly trying to sell".*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"Yabloko's party license, of course, will remain with Yavlinsky, there's no other way. He...will not let go of this license, I guarantee you this."*

Appendix 3.6: Coherent ideology vs political effectiveness

- ***The need to prioritise effectiveness:***

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"I think that in Russia ideology doesn't work, in Russia there is a distinction between those, who are active and independent [from the regime] and set their own agenda – which eventually comes to something more or less identical, despite people having diverse values – and those, who are inactive and rely on the regime, that's it."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"...many people within the opposition can't understand that politics is, first and foremost, however pragmatic it may sound, but it is primarily about the results, right? So if you don't get elected, if you don't achieve any results and don't gain office...what's the point?"*

- ***Criticism regarding the absence of a coherent ideology:***

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"I completely understand the idea that for the sake of getting more votes during elections we have to resort to populism, it is one of the possible strategies – that is what Navalny is doing."*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"...do you remember the party programme of People's Alliance [later renamed Progress Party]? It...essentially, it didn't exist. It stated that we supported a professional army, introduction of some adequate visas and so on. I mean, it was not a programme but simply a set of slogans."*

Appendix 5.1: Political effectiveness of various opposition parties and the role of party registration

- ***Selecting a party on the basis of its greater effectiveness***

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team)*: "There are people who create their own [political] agenda, they are effective, and I want to work with them."*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"At the time it seemed to be one of the few remaining opportunities to participate in real politics because there were no alternatives. All other [political forces] were in stagnation."*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"Well, Yabloko at least maintains some level of political activity and Parnas does not engage in any activity whatsoever. For example, it has to be noted that it was Yabloko who ran the municipal campaign in 2017 – Yabloko and not Parnas. Two hundred [opposition] municipal deputies [were elected], we proved the sceptics wrong."*

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"...if we are talking about some significant electoral events, Yabloko has more success stories after all."*

- ***The importance of being a member of a registered party***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"I think in the current situation an officially registered party is a valuable resource that should be utilised – even if it's a bad party."*

Interviewee 16 (member of Yabloko):

"If you want to participate in politics, the legislation obliges you to be in a registered political party, in order to be elected…"

"If you want to participate in elections as they are today and fight for power – and this is the purpose of any party's existence: right-wing, left-wing, centrist and others – then the only way is to participate in elections in accordance with the current legislation. In order to do this, you need a party structure that has a right to participate in elections. In our country only parties can take part in elections – neither party blocs, nor movements, nor anything else can do it."

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change):

"It was important for me, even though I understood the strictness of party registration requirements, the registered status of the party was an important condition [when choosing a party to join]."

"Party structure is undoubtedly important in order to gain power legitimately."

- ***Disadvantages of registered parties***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party):

"I think that at the moment political activity should exist outside of parties, it should not be partisan – like Navalny does it, for example – he achieves success without any party."

"In my view, in today's Russia, taking into account all the barriers that the authorities have put in place, partisan activity is essentially impossible. It is only possible at the grassroots level: when some municipal deputy is running for election, he doesn't care which of the parties nominates him – Yabloko, CPRF – it makes no difference. He simply uses it...as a tool to avoid signature collection."

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"What is a party in today's Russia? In today's Russia it is an enormous bureaucratic structure that exists in order to constrain politicians, unfortunately. A party is very difficult to sustain – not only financially but also organisationally. There are draconian legal requirements in relation to various types of accountability, regional representation and so on. Most parties consist of empty shell regional branches that submit a 'nil' return..."*

Interviewee 19 (former member of Navalny's team and the Anti-Corruption Foundation): *"Our party system degraded to such an extent that party membership has become meaningless."*

Appendix 5.2: Interviewees about the Progress Party

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *[About the Progress Party] "...you see, we had quite a peculiar party management system – namely, the party brand belonged to the structure that was up in the clouds, relative to us [ordinary party members] – Navalny, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, right?"*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"At the same time, admittedly, People's Alliance [Progress Party] even back then was not a very developed structure, as you might remember. Navalny has always treated the party as some volunteer-based addition [to the Anti-Corruption Foundation] ...a party brand, which could be used as a bargaining tool in negotiations, when forming a wider coalition."*

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"In my view, there was essentially no party, it was a small group of Navalny supporters, who were coming to [party] meetings to listen."*

Appendix 5.3: Selecting a party on the basis of its leader

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"...I believe at the moment the majority of people within the opposition don't think about ideology at all. Rather, everything is built around personalities or, on the contrary, around the distaste for some personalities."*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"I came across Vladimir Milov's article...he wrote very sharply, adequately and made a good point...Milov always consistently spoke out in favour of participation in elections under any circumstances, he prepared economic reports with Nemtsov – and in general, we shared similar values because he was the kind of person with centre-right views. I liked it, so I applied [to join his party]..."*

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Back then it was a party centred around Navalny, Navalny was the most effective politician within the opposition, so it was the logical choice to join this particular party."*

Interviewee 19 (former member of Navalny's team and the Anti-Corruption Foundation): *"Well, I didn't know anyone back then. I wanted to feel a sense of community with a group and noticed the movement that had the largest media presence. Back then it felt like there were going to be rapid political changes and I had to choose the most 'successful' opposition group. [Party] registration didn't matter, ideology mattered somewhat, but the most important thing, of course, was Alexey Navalny – as the leader, who almost reached the second round of the Moscow mayoral election."*

Interviewee 11 (member of the Solidarity movement, former member of Parnas): *"At the time of Parnas' establishment I was working with Boris Nemtsov and coordinating the distribution of his [anti-corruption] reports in Moscow, we worked together a lot…and therefore, I joined Parnas simply following his call."*

Appendix 5.4: Internal democratic mechanisms

- ***The importance of internal democratic mechanisms***

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"…If this is a democratic party, it is important to have genuine internal democratic institutions that are properly functioning. In order to avoid a situation where people declare their intentions to build a democracy in the country, while at the same time maintaining dictatorships [within their own organisations]. I believe that they should strive to build a democracy within their organisations as well, which implies facilitating intra-party competition and maintaining fairness."*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"And in general, if the activists value the principles of democracy in and of themselves, the higher up you look, the closer you get to the leaders – the more you come across some trivial private interests".*

- ***Failed democratic mechanisms within the Progress Party***

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party):

"[About internal elections in the Progress Party] Well, to be honest, the situation with these elections was quite predictable...it was more or less obvious in advance of the election that the majority of the Central Party Council would consist of the employees of the Anti-Corruption Foundation – closest allies of Navalny...Thus, the results of these particular elections – organised and held in this manner – they are quite predictable. There is virtually no connection between the elected and the voters...those

people at the top – they are not in any way accountable [to ordinary party members] and therefore, they have no incentive to take their opinions into account. Did Navalny and the Central Council communicate with party members in any way? After the online voting or before that, or after elections held at the party congresses? The answer is no."

"This was one of my disappointments – the fact that the initial idea of a mass party with the mechanisms of direct democracy, proposed by Ashurkov and Volkov [Navalny's allies]...was eventually abandoned by its creators."

- ***This attempt to introduce online voting within the Moscow branch of the party – why do you think it failed?***

"...there was nothing that we could influence using this voting, nothing that people would be interested in. And voting for the sake of voting – well, everyone had a bit of fun with these buttons, with this [voting] software and lost interest in it. Who will vote if voting ceases to have any effect, right?"

Appendix 5.5: Criticism of the Yabloko leadership

- ***Attitude towards party leadership among some Yabloko members:***

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"I would never have joined Yabloko had it simply been a call by Yavlinsky or Emilia Slabunova [former party's chairwoman]. They are cool and so on, but they cannot work with the younger audience."*

- ***Ineffectiveness of the central Yabloko apparatus during the 2017 and 2019 election campaigns in Moscow:***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"[About the 2017 Moscow municipal campaign]...in 2017 there was a functioning central campaign team, but it was counter-productive...our candidate wasted energy trying to neutralise their efforts."*

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *[About the 2019 Moscow City Duma campaign] "A simple example: Yabloko…organised canvassing points in the centre [of Moscow] called 'We need your vote'…I passed them three times and the canvassers never came up to me…What does it mean? It means that they are paid by the hour and not according to the results. Therefore, they [Yabloko management] are wasting resources without any significant outputs. This is simply a managerial failure – allocating funds for something that does not bring any results."*

Appendix 5.6: Demand for renewal

- ***About "new" parties:***

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"I left it [Yabloko] and joined DemVybor because DemVybor seemed to be a new political force*

that could bring about real change...I liked that there were young people in DemVybor, it was truly a new party with new people, new ideas…"

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"We are the new generation of politicians – this is our slogan – we do politics in a new way."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"[About the 5th of December Party] And plus, there were none of those same faces that everyone was tired of, like Yavlinsky and Kasyanov. It was something fresh, an attempt to build something new on the basis of the wave of protests [in 2011-2012]".*

- ***About "old" parties:***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"Well, Parnas has always been associated with something old and dull because it was a party of people who were once well-known politicians, such as Kasyanov, Ryzhkov. I have always viewed it [Parnas] as a vestige of the old era, so I wasn't interested. I mean, I had no trust in Kasyanov because he worked for Putin's government…"*

Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor): *"Yabloko and Parnas – they were old parties by that time and we wanted a new one, not a bureaucratic type of party but a party of new people that joined the protest."*

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"...I had many questions and doubts in relation to the adequacy and the future of these old party structures, such as Yabloko. I mean, there is minimal activity, a minimum of any rational political action – a mere exploitation of a well-recognised brand achieved over the previous years."*

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"[About Parnas and Yabloko] These old leader-centric parties can hardly be reformed…"*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"[About Parnas and Yabloko] These are traditional liberal parties of the previous generation, with a puppet party council and fights over everything at all levels…"*

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"At the end of 2013 I realised that the party [Yabloko] had no political future, it was unwilling to change, to develop, to reform, it didn't meet modern demands and public expectations. I left it..."*

- ***Expectations of renewal within Yabloko***

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"[After the team of Maxim Katz joined Moscow Yabloko] I think that part of the [Yabloko's] team is being renewed...there are around four hundred people, who are very active – they are truly enthusiastic volunteers, ready to spend their time and money [on partisan activities] and they are willing to reform this party."*

Appendix 5.7: The degree of opposition to the regime and risk management

- ***The degree of opposition to the regime***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"I chose the Progress Party because at the time it seemed to be the only party that matched my views because it was...the most radically opposed to the regime."*

- ***High risks associated with party activities***

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change): *"[About the Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation] Plus, I suppose I am quite a careful person...I didn't dare to join some of the more risk-taking movements."*

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team):

"Indeed, he [Alexey Navalny] does really cool things but I had a fear that if I joined their team, I would face repressions aimed against these activists. In his team you have to be ready to face that and I wasn't ready to bear these risks."

"[About the Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation] Some of the opposition forces have problems associated with the high level of pressure from law enforcement agencies. Unfortunately, this adds to their negative points."

- ***Exclusion of certain parties from the non-systemic opposition***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"…these systemic parties, and semi-systemic – such as Yabloko, CPRF – they tend to be very anti-government at the grassroots level, so ordinary activists are very decent people; but the higher up you get, the higher is the level of conformity, so those at the top have merged with this regime completely."*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"[About Civic Initiative] It definitely does not belong to the opposition. It cannot be counted [as opposition], this is a spoiler project created by the Kremlin."*

Appendix 5.8: The role of party's ideological position, programme and policies

- ***Specific ideological positions or policies do not play any significant role in opposition politics, given the current undemocratic political environment***

- ***So, just to clarify, what were your main criteria when choosing which party to join?***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"Fight against the regime. Ideology didn't matter because everyone understood that there would be no specific ideology until we replaced Putin. It didn't matter whether you were left-wing or right-wing...the Progress Party for me was similar to Bolotnaya [protests] – there was no ideology, only the struggle against the regime...it was clear to me and, I guess, to everyone else that we gathered there to overthrow Putin, Putinism, that's all."*

- ***And the ideological component – whether the party is more right-wing or left-wing – is this important or not?***

Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor): *"In the present-day Russia, probably not. I mean, it would be like dividing the power before we won it, when the main problem is Putin sitting in the Kremlin..."*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"[About the left-right distinction] I think that in Russia ideology doesn't work, in Russia there is a distinction between those, who are active and independent [from the regime] and set their own agenda – which eventually comes to something more or less identical, despite people having diverse values – and those, who are inactive and reliant on the regime, that's it."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia):

"...I believe that at the moment the majority of people within the opposition don't think about ideology at all. Rather, everything is built around personalities or, on the contrary, around the distaste for some personalities."

"...no one reads most of the party programmes at all. If you ask someone at a rally whether they have read any of the party programmes, most people will say either that they haven't, that there is nothing to read, or that they are all identical... Somehow there is no emphasis on that, perhaps, due to the fact that the opposition is prevented from participating in important elections, where there is a real chance of winning…"

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"Well, there is no ideological incompatibility because opposition in general has very little ideology."*

- ***Similar ideologies of opposition parties***

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"[About opposition parties] They all have virtually the same ideology."*

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Ideological differences are not so important, I think, because...at this stage practically the whole liberal camp has an identical ideology, with the exception of, perhaps, a more left-wing Yabloko or DemVybor, which is more right-wing...So the main problem is leaders' ambitions."*

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change): *"Within the non-systemic opposition there is no significant ideological incompatibility...Rather, incompatibility is related to the dislike of certain leaders, certain personalities."*

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"...at the ideological level, there are a number of principles that unite many political forces – for example, that we are against Putin, against the current regime or in favour of doing at least something useful. But it's definitely not about the left-wing or right-wing shift, taxing corporations or increasing taxes to subsidise social [services]...this is not being discussed anywhere, apart from maybe some marginal groups (marginal in terms of numbers) ."*

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"To be honest, I generally don't pay much attention to political statements. What I care about is a certain fundamental basis – European path of development – quite a simple basis, which unites practically all of these [opposition] parties…"*

Appendix 5.9: Interviewees' opinions regarding the role of ideology in the political party DemVybor

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor):

"In DemVybor, I liked the fact that they [party members] weren't afraid to speak out openly about the Russian immigration policy, the visa rules and...the nation state."

"DemVybor is a right-wing liberal party, so we are in favour of a free market economy, increasing the number of private enterprises...Also, we support strict immigration policy, introduction of a visa regime with the countries of Central Asia and prioritising the native population – Russians."

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"DemVybor has never positioned itself as a party representing some specific part of the ideological spectrum. On the contrary, we tried to depart from this division into liberals, nationalists, left-wing, right-wing."*

Appendix 5.10: Critique of Yabloko's internal principles

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko):

"[About the exclusion of members from Yabloko on the basis of their public statements] ...this concept of a [potential] reputational damage is being used as a bargaining tool in the rivalry between different intra-party groups: so if X said something controversial, for example, the assessment of these words by Y will be determined by the extent to which Y wants X to be excluded from the party, rather than by the actual meaning of X's words. This policy of double standards upsets me greatly."

"...this rhetoric of moral righteousness and the belief in being the only ones maintaining some moral, democratic principles – it doesn't look good within the context of a 30-year-long history of constant compromises, let's put it like this."

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"There was a story with my exclusion from Yabloko…there were some laughable excuses, [exclusion] on the basis on nazism, nationalism, some chauvinist and other views. And the story was plain and simple: it was all because of what I said after the [2013] mayoral election, that we made many mistakes and failed essentially because we were fighting against Navalny, against the opposition, instead of criticising [the incumbent mayor] Sobyanin."*

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"[About Yabloko] So, in reality…the internal mechanism very often doesn't match the publicly declared ideas and approaches."*

Appendix 5.11: Strengths and weaknesses of different opposition parties

Registered parties
Civic Initiative/Party of Change
Strengths: ● Registered party ● Relatively well-recognised leaders ● Opportunity to reform the party after the new leaders Kseniya Sobchak and Dmitry Gudkov joined in 2018
● ***Party registration*** ***Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change):*** *"It was important for me, even though I understood the strictness of party registration requirements, the registered status of the party was an important condition [when choosing a party to join]."* ● ***New leaders and the hope of party renewal*** ***Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change):*** *"[After the new leaders Kseniya Sobchak and Dmitry Gudkov joined the party in 2018] The party has become more flexible, more energetic and responds faster to various political events. Well, initially it was effectively an old democrats' club...old democrats, who worked with Yel'tsin. But now it resembles a party, despite all of its shortcomings related to the personality of Sobchak and Gudkov and the fact that the focus has shifted from party activities to issues concerning their personalities."* *"New people joined the party [in 2018] and not only those who followed Gudkov and Sobchak, but also those who simply wanted to join the new party..."* ***Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor):*** *"As I see it, Sobchak brought a new momentum to the [2018 presidential] campaign...I decided there and then that I was going to vote for her because of the slogan that she adopted – "against all", against old leaders, against the system and so on – I agreed with it 100%."*

Weaknesses:

- Reputation as a "spoiler" party, accusations of cooperation with the regime
- Questionable reputation of some party leaders, unwillingness of other opposition forces to cooperate with this party
- Inability to register the new party name (Party of Change) in order to complete the rebranding process
- Failure to attract resources due to the lack of interest in this party within the opposition community

- ***Spoiler party cooperating with the regime***

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"[About Civic Initiative]...it always participates in elections as a spoiler party."*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"I would never cooperate with Civic Initiative (Party of Change)...because I consider them 'spoilers', they are not independent in their decision-making."*

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team):

"[About Kseniya Sobchak] She seems to say the right things, but I believe she lost the initiative when her home was searched and she realised that she had something to lose. And now I doubt that she…is a person who is really in the opposition and genuinely wants to achieve some changes."

"I don't think that the Party of Change is really trying to change the regime, they are comfortable with their status as the opposition within this regime, that's what I think."

- ***Unpopular politicians among party leaders***

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"It's quite obvious that Sobchak is simply trying to make money off everything and to date, this has not been disproved in any way."*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"[The founder of Civic Initiative Andrey] Nechayev is a corrupt person from the 1990s, I have no reason to cooperate with him."*

- ***Insufficient resources due to a lack of interest in the party***

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"Civic Initiative – I think it has no party members, apart from Nechayev, and every time he attempts to bring someone in, to unite with someone, simply because he has a registered party."*

Interviewee 16 (member of Yabloko): *"What's going on with Civic Initiative? Less than a year has passed [since new leaders joined the party] – there's already no sign of a party. It still hasn't been renamed, it has no members, no finances, nothing."*

Parnas/former RPR-Parnas
Strengths: ● Registered party ● Willing to engage in coalitions with other opposition forces ● Well-recognised leader (former Russian Prime Minister) ● The most anti-regime of registered parties
● ***The most anti-regime of registered parties*** ***Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party):*** *"...it is clear that Parnas is truly an opposition party, not like Yabloko, not as capable of reaching agreements [with the regime]."* ● ***Positive attitude towards coalitions*** ***Interviewee 6 (member of Parnas and the Solidarity movement):*** *"In Parnas we have always been proponents of coalition formation, we have always proposed to form coalitions..."* ● ***Party registration*** ***Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor):*** *"...we had debates within the 5th of December Party [in 2015-2016] on why we remain independent, why don't we all join Parnas, for example. Parnas has a party registration, we can unite with them and form a separate faction within the party…"*
Weaknesses: ● Image as an "old" (backward) party, unable to reform ● Negative attitude towards the party among the general public due to its leaders' reputation as politicians coming from the 1990s era ● Unsuccessful election campaigns and ineffective political activities ● Unchangeable leadership and a lack of democratic mechanisms within the party
● ***Negative associations with the period of 1990s/early 2000s*** ***Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party):*** *"Well, Parnas has always been associated with something old and dull because it was a party of people who were once well-known politicians, such as Kasyanov, Ryzhkov. I have always viewed it [Parnas] as a vestige of the old era, so I wasn't interested. I mean, I had no trust in Kasyanov because he worked for Putin's government…"* ***Interviewee 18 (member of the Libertarian Party):*** *"[About the election campaigns in 2015-2016] "Let's not forget that there was a very negative attitude towards Kasyanov*

and Parnas within the society...We – those who were canvassing – we faced a very negative public reaction to the mentioning of Parnas, extremely negative."

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change): *"I don't trust Kasyanov, after all he was a person from Putin's inner circle at the start – he and the whole Union of Right Forces [SPS] – they supported Putin back then."*

- ***Excessive dependence on party leaders, a lack of leadership rotation and resistance to change***

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *[About Parnas and Yabloko] "These old leader-centric parties can hardly be reformed…"*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *[About Parnas and Yabloko] "These are traditional liberal parties of the previous generation, with a puppet party council and fights over everything at all levels…"*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *[About the choice of party] "...why not Yabloko or Parnas – because by that time both of them had already been in existence for a while and I could see that neither of them could achieve anything – all the same unchangeable leaders and so on."*

- ***Ineffectiveness***

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change): *"I can't remember any significant breakthroughs by Parnas, apart from when they nominated Navalny as a candidate for the 2013 [Moscow] mayoral election."*

Yabloko

Strengths:

- Party registration
- Attempts to reform the party and improve its image
- Well-recognised leader and a party brand, small but stable electoral basis
- Experienced politicians among party members
- Electoral successes at the local level, such as the Moscow municipal campaign in 2017 or the Moscow City Duma campaign in 2019
- Ability to attract funding in order to maintain the party apparatus and regional branches
- According to some members: a more coherent ideology, compared to other opposition parties

- ***Some electoral successes***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"[About 2017-2019] Well, Yabloko maintains at least some level of political activity and Parnas does not engage in any activity whatsoever. For example, it has to be noted that it was Yabloko who ran the municipal campaign in 2017 – Yabloko and not Parnas. Two hundred [opposition] municipal deputies [were elected], we proved the sceptics wrong."*

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team):

"...they have, however small, a stable base of loyal voters, at least in Moscow and Saint Petersburg – a significant number of people, who consistently turn out to vote for Yabloko. This small resource cannot be ignored."

"...if we are talking about some significant electoral events, Yabloko has more success stories after all."

- ***Party registration***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"I think in the current situation an officially registered party is a valuable resource that should be utilised – even if it's a bad party."*

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"And in addition, the majority of other [opposition] parties...they have problems with the registration process, they are being denied registration."*

- ***Attempts to reform the party***

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team):

"[After the team of Maxim Katz joined Moscow Yabloko] I think that part of the [Yabloko] team is being renewed...there are around four hundred people who are very active – they are truly enthusiastic volunteers, ready to spend their time and money [on partisan activities] and they are willing to reform this party."

"I think the primary advantage [of Yabloko] is that we have the experience of the first Russian democrats, plus a young team that has been engaged in politics since 2011 [the team of Maxim Katz]..."

- ***Ability to attract funding in order to maintain the party apparatus and regional branches***

Interviewee 16 (member of Yabloko):

"Grigory Alekseyevich [Yavlinsky] is truly a person, who manages to maintain the prolonged existence of this party, including the financial side – he knows how to attract funds."

"At the moment there is no other person in the Russian political arena, apart from Grigory Alekseyevich [Yavlinsky] and Alexey Anatol'yevich [Navalny], who can raise significant funds, considering the fact that it is generally impossible to sponsor the opposition here...Grigory Alekseyevich has his own ways of achieving this, unknown to me, using his old connections or something else."

- ***Ideological position***

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"One of the factors that influenced my decision to join the Yabloko party was their position in relation to Crimea and Ukraine, which exactly matched my own position. It was, is and will always be important for me because I wouldn't like to join a party that doesn't match my views. There are certain issues that serve as a litmus test."*

Weaknesses:

- Unwillingness to engage in opposition coalitions
- Reputation as an "old" (backward) party of a previous generation with an ineffective party apparatus and resistance to reform
- Permanent leader who is unpopular among the general public and the opposition community
- Non-functioning democratic mechanisms within the party: centralised decision-making and a lack of connection between the activist and the leadership level
- Discrepancies between the declared values and real political decisions
- Accusations against the party leadership of engaging in covert agreements with the Presidential Administration
- Ineffectiveness of federal-level election campaigns and other political activities that involve party leadership

- ***Accusations of cooperation with the regime, a mismatch between the activist level and the level of party leaders***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party):

"…these systemic parties, and semi-systemic – such as Yabloko, CPRF – they tend to be very anti-government at the grassroots level, so ordinary activists are very decent people; but the higher up you get, the higher is the level of conformity, so those at the top have merged with this regime completely. For example, Yavlinsky participated in the presidential election [in 2018] – it was laughable."

"My main criticism of Yabloko is related to their cooperation with the authorities. They exist as liberals for show – 'here are your liberals, vote for them'. They will win 1%, like Sobchak, also a caricature liberal."

- ***Image as an "old" party and resistance to reform***

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"...Yabloko is fearful of changes within their organisation: they are used to living by the same rules for 20-30 years and are reluctant to accept any newcomers...they are afraid of any kind of transformations or reforms."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"...no one wants to unite with Yabloko because it is an old party that has proved time and time again that it is incapable of change...they are unable to select a different presidential candidate, for example, despite it being obvious that Yavlinsky is a complete failure, his retirement is long overdue."*

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"I believe that not everyone in Yabloko agrees that the party should be renewed in such a radical way as the younger members want. I think that some of them simply want us to fit in and accept the existing rules of the game…perhaps, they are just scared of our excessive activity."*

- ***Unwillingness to engage in coalitions***

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"Yabloko never unites with anyone, practically never, except for some minor isolated cases."*

Interviewee 6 (member of Parnas and the Solidarity movement): *"Yabloko is also incapable of forming coalitions."*

- ***Ineffectiveness of political activities, ineffective leadership***

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"...I had many questions and doubts in relation to the adequacy and the future of these old party structures, such as Yabloko. I mean, there is minimal activity, a minimum of any rational political action – a mere exploitation of a well-recognised brand achieved over the previous years."*

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change):

"[About Yabloko]...I understood that its leaders were directing the democratic movement towards a dead end and were causing rivalries between the democrats."

"...if we are talking about Yabloko – they often have debates on completely irrelevant issues...some ethical matters are discussed, people are not being accepted into the party because they said something long ago...some people are excluded because they joined some kind of rally at some point...so with all these conversations there is no time left for real [political] activities."

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"[About the 2017 Moscow municipal campaign]...in 2017 there was a functioning central campaign team [in Yabloko], but it was counter-productive...our candidate wasted energy trying to neutralise their efforts."*

- ***Non-functioning democratic mechanisms within the party***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"A group led by Maxim Katz has been seeking to hold a general party meeting...in order to elect new party leadership [within the Moscow branch]. This is met with strong resistance from Yavlinsky, among others, who are unwilling to allow free elections within their party. It is worth mentioning that the Yabloko party is undeniably censoring its members. For this reason, I availed of my right to remain anonymous, precisely to avoid being kicked out of the party."*

- ***Policy of double standards in relation to ideological consistency***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko):

"...Yabloko's manifesto, as you probably know, which all candidates [nominated by Yabloko for elections] had to sign, implies a recognition of the international law in relation to Crimea – the acknowledgement that Crimea belongs to Ukraine. I know for a fact that many of the deputies that Yabloko supported actually believe that Crimea should belong to Russia. Some of them hated it [the manifesto] so much that they refused to sign it...but the Yabloko apparatus chose to turn a blind eye."

"...this rhetoric of moral righteousness and the belief in being the only ones maintaining some moral, democratic principles – it doesn't look good within the context of a 30-year-long history of constant compromises, let's put it like this."

Unregistered parties

DemVybor

Strengths:

- According to some members: a more coherent ideology, compared to other opposition parties

Before the split in 2015-2016 (before Vladimir Milov and his supporters left the party):

- Relatively popular party leader, free from associations with the 'old democrats' and the politics of the 1990s
- Party capable of attracting young people and offering new ideas

- ***Different opinions in relation to the ideology of DemVybor***

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor):

"In DemVybor, I liked the fact that they [party members] weren't afraid to speak out openly about the Russian immigration policy, the visa rules and...the nation state."

"DemVybor is a right-wing liberal party, so we are in favour of a free market economy, increasing the number of private enterprises, so that the economy could develop in that direction and not the opposite, away from the state-controlled economy...We support the reduction of state share [in the economy] and the development of small business. Also, we support strict immigration policy, introduction of a visa regime with the countries of Central Asia and prioritising the native population – Russians."

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"DemVybor has never positioned itself as a party representing some specific part of*

the ideological spectrum. On the contrary, we tried to depart from this division into liberals, nationalists, left-wing, right-wing. We are the new generation of politicians – this is our slogan – we do politics in a new way. At the same time, those values that were promoted in the texts of party members – they have always appealed to me."

- ***Party capable of attracting young people and offering new ideas***

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"I left it [Yabloko] and joined DemVybor because DemVybor seemed to be a new political force that could bring about real change...I liked that there were young people in DemVybor, it was truly a new party with new people, new ideas…"*

Weaknesses:

- Lack of resources: human, financial, organisational
- Low number of candidates put forward during elections at various levels
- Before the split: excessive dependence on a single party leader (Vladimir Milov)

After the split in 2015-2016:

- Loss of the party registration
- Accusations of cooperation with the Presidential Administration
- Party was weakened by the split

- ***Party split and the loss of the party license***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"[About DemVybor after the split] "As I understand, the party license was taken from DemVybor, but license aside, does the party even exist anymore? It disappeared...DemVybor is gone completely, I haven't noticed any activity there."*

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"DemVybor is now divided in two, they are all split up, it's not clear what is going on there. So, the main problem is leaders' ambitions: no matter how hard [opposition members] try to unite, it always leads to some kind of division."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"...from the outside, it looked like they [DemVybor members] simply couldn't reach an agreement with each other. Vladimir Milov wanted to remain a single party leader, but there were people who disagreed with that. They couldn't agree, as I understand, about the voting procedure...about the election, results of which would be accepted by everyone, so they split apart."*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"DemVybor effectively no longer exists – as you probably know, they have been officially dissolved. Meanwhile, [Vladimir] Milov ended*

up on one side, [Sergey] Zhavoronkov – on the other, the two main leaders of DemVybor who are now cursing each other."

- ***Alleged cooperation with the regime***

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"After Milov lost his party...the power there was taken by the people associated with the Presidential Administration...so they are completely toxic."*

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"I would put it like this: a number of political losers wanted to exclude Milov from the party. People who were worthless wanted to become party leaders, they disliked the fact that Milov was a strong leader, that he held this position and was unwilling to give it up...Milov made some concessions, but they continued to push and triggered a split – hijacked the party, essentially. The party lost its registration because of them. And I cannot rule out connections with the Kremlin...because they literally never leave the state TV channels – all day long they are on NTV and the First Channel."*

Libertarian Party

Strengths:

- The most ideology-driven party within the opposition, party members consistently defend and promote their ideology within the opposition community and beyond
- Willingness to cooperate with other opposition forces

- ***Distinct ideology***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"Out of this list [of opposition forces], perhaps, only the libertarians have a distinct ideology, a clear ideological stance, and they will continue to exist after the death of their leader."*

Interviewee 18 (member of the Libertarian Party):

"From the very beginning it was a libertarian party, specifically an ideological party. We make sure that every member shares our values – they should support the reduction of state intervention in the economy, private lives of people and so on. I would put it like this: at the moment we are the most ideological party within the opposition."

"Many young people and people in general joined our party [recently]...we had to introduce probationary periods, stricter selection procedures [for new members] and other measures. We don't chase the numbers, numbers are not important for us – we want members to share our positions, our views. This, of course, leads to some internal tensions because if we are an ideological party, it means that the ideological aspect plays a crucial role."

Weaknesses:

- A lack of resources: human, financial, organisational
- Ineffectiveness of party activities as a result of prioritising ideological debates over electoral participation
- Low number of candidates put forward for elections
- Ideology of the Libertarian Party is viewed as overly radical by the majority of opposition members
- Excessive factionalism due to ideological debates within the party

- ***Ineffectiveness of political activities***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"There is such a thing as political ambition, desire to become a candidate and be elected...become a municipal deputy, for example. I think that the Libertarian Party lacks this, they are more interested in discussing something, gathering, publishing their own newspaper. I haven't heard them having any political ambitions."*

- ***Extreme ideology***

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change):

"Libertarian Party – I think they have quite strange views in many respects and they defend them in a very aggressive manner."

"I mean, in a way it [Libertarian Party] resembles some kind of cult or some sort of anarchist group. They are unwilling to hear any opposing arguments, they value their views and refuse to listen to criticism, alternative arguments, comments and so on, so for them the [libertarian] idea is of paramount importance."

- ***Excessive factionalism as a result of ideological disagreements***

Interviewee 18 (member of the Libertarian Party): *"I observed it [Libertarian Party] since its formation in 2008 but I was confused by their strange party constitution with plenty of different factions...the party is a few weeks old and already has a thousand factions – I didn't like that."*

Progress Party/People's Alliance/Russia of the Future and the Anti-Corruption Foundation

Strengths:

- Popular leaders
- Professional team
- Effectiveness of political activities due to the ability to attract resources, including volunteer mobilisation and fundraising capacity

- Strong media resources and organisational capabilities
- New approaches to politics: innovative campaigning tools, promotion of new political ideas, such as primaries within the opposition and other direct democracy practices
- The ability to unite activists with diverse views
- Generally viewed as the most anti-regime political force

- ***Popular leader and effective team, new approaches to politics***

Interviewee 8: (member of the Progress Party, a coordinator of the election observation movement): *[About the decision to join People's Alliance/Progress Party] "Firstly, back then Navalny was accumulating political capital fairly quickly and he gathered a very strong and broad team of interesting people around him, starting with Ashurkov...well, we could name a long list – all of those who created People's Alliance back then...they expressed fresh ideas…"*

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Back then it was a party centred around Navalny, Navalny was the most effective politician within the opposition, so it was the logical choice to join this particular party."*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team):

"[About Alexey Navalny]...he was a self-made man – a person who achieved everything himself, who didn't have any connections or political past."

"...in the past, politics was considered a sector where finances simply appeared out of nowhere...and everyone used that situation, there was an impression that politics was elitist and opportunistic. And Navalny was [the first] Western-style politician who made certain commitments, offered political services and at the same time...was funded through donations from ordinary supporters. It was a breakthrough."

- ***Effective political activities***

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"...their active engagement in politics appeared attractive, it gathered many active people around them. And in general, it is more pleasant and more beneficial to be part of something lively and active. In addition, as I mentioned before, communication and activities within the Moscow branch [of the Progress Party] allowed me to involve volunteers and party members in election observation and other civic projects…"*

- ***More radically opposed to the regime, compared to other opposition parties***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"I chose the Progress Party because at the time it seemed to be the only party that matched my views because it was...the most radically opposed to the regime."*

- ***The ability to unite people with diverse views***

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"If you remember, he [Navalny] had no specific ideological platform…[his] campaign team*

consisted of left-wing people, right-wing, centrists, liberals, and all of them got along with each other under this non-ideological platform of Navalny. Think of even the campaign office in 2013 [the Moscow mayoral campaign]: I was in the legal support department, nationalists were sitting across from me, leftists – who only recently were members of the [far-left movement] Left Front – were sitting on the right. And these people somehow managed to work together and avoid conflicts."

Weaknesses:

- High risks associated with their activities
- Lack of investment in the development of the Progress Party and the concentration of power in the hands of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, whose leaders are non-elected
- Lack of functioning democratic mechanisms, leader-centric structure
- Insufficient number of candidates put forward for elections at various levels; focus on the promotion of existing leaders, a lack of support for new emerging politicians
- Accusations of populist politics
- Difficulties surrounding coalition-building with the participation of Alexey Navalny due to his dominant position within the coalition

- ***Leader-centric structure***

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"...if we're talking about the Progress Party...they have everything centred around Alexey Navalny...in my opinion, people join the Progress Party because they know Navalny and want to work with him."*

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"...within Navalny's team – they have this sort of thing, how can I put it...Navalny's personality cult. They have some other [well-known] allies but this cult – it slightly bothers me."*

- ***Difficulties with coalition-building due to Navalny's ambition to be a single opposition leader***

Interviewee 6 (member of Parnas and the Solidarity movement): *"...some parties and some leaders of these parties proved their inability to reach agreements – Navalny, for example...he views himself as a single opposition leader and he is incapable of coming to an agreement with anyone at all."*

Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor): *"Navalny, as I see it, has adopted a scorched earth policy, meaning that he is not willing to share his resources and popularity with anyone. He is ready to take someone else's popularity and combine with his own, but he won't share his resources with others. Much like Putin is pursuing a scorched earth policy in the general Russian*

political arena, Navalny is doing the same within the opposition – 'if not me, then who?'."

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"...Navalny, being one of the most powerful opposition members, at present is, in fact, in the process of...clearing the opposition political arena...many of his and his team's actions are aimed at confronting other opposition politicians or potential politicians, who target the same electorate."*

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement):

"Navalny enjoys such political weight that any cooperation [with him] can easily transform into 'ah, went under Navalny'..."

"Navalny's political weight stands out to such an extent that he will suppress everyone else [within the coalition] or will somehow interfere with communication among others, in my opinion."

- ***Concentration of decision-making powers in the hands of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, as opposed to the Progress Party; a lack of functioning democratic mechanisms within the party***

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party):

"[About the Progress Party]...you see, we had quite a peculiar party management system – namely, the party brand belonged to the structure that was up in the clouds, relative to us [ordinary party members] – Navalny, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, right?"

"[About internal elections in the Progress Party] Well, to be honest, the situation with these elections was quite predictable...it was more or less obvious in advance of the election that the majority of the Central Party Council would consist of the employees of the Anti-Corruption Foundation – closest allies of Navalny...Thus, the results of these particular elections – organised and held in this manner – they are quite predictable. There is virtually no connection between the elected and the voters...those people at the top – they are not in any way accountable [to ordinary party members] and therefore, they have no incentive to take their opinions into account. Did Navalny and the Central Council communicate with party members in any way? After the online voting or before that, or after elections held at the party congresses? The answer is no."

"This was one of my disappointments – the fact that the initial idea of a mass party with the mechanisms of direct democracy, proposed by Ashurkov and Volkov [Navalny's allies]...was eventually abandoned by its creators."

- ***This attempt to introduce online voting within the Moscow branch of the party – why do you think it failed?***

"...there was nothing that we could influence using this voting, nothing that people would be interested in. And voting for the sake of voting – well, everyone had a bit of fun with these buttons, with this [voting] software and lost interest in it. Who will vote if voting ceases to have any effect, right?"

- ***Lack of party development***

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"In my view, there was essentially no party, it was a small group of Navalny supporters, who were coming to [party] meetings to listen."*

- ***Risk factor***

Interviewee 15 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team):

"Indeed, he [Alexey Navalny] does really cool things but I had a fear that if I joined their team, I would face repressions aimed against these activists. In his team you have to be ready to face that and I wasn't ready to bear these risks."

"[About the Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation] Some of the opposition forces have problems associated with the high level of pressure from law enforcement agencies. Unfortunately, this adds to their negative points."

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change): *"[About the Progress Party and the Anti-Corruption Foundation] Plus, I suppose I am quite a careful person...I didn't dare to join some of the more risk-taking movements."*

- ***Insufficient number of election candidates***

Interviewee 13 (member of Civic Initiative/Party of Change): *"...if we are talking about Navalny – he is focused on certain specific ideas, while ignoring other important issues. For example, he thinks that street politics will be the first to achieve some results, but they [Navalny's team] are not very active in terms of electoral participation [at the local level], even at the moment. How many of Navalny's people are taking part in the current Moscow City Duma election [2019]?...Only a few people, while they could have divided the districts between [opposition] parties and nominated 15-20 people…"*

- ***Populist politics and a lack of coherent ideology***

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"I completely understand the idea that for the sake of getting more votes during elections we have to resort to populism, it is one of the possible strategies – that is what Navalny is doing."*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"...do you remember the party programme of People's Alliance [later renamed Progress Party]? It...essentially, it didn't exist. It stated that we supported a professional army, introduction of some adequate visas and so on. I mean, it was not a programme but simply a set of slogans."*

5th of December Party

Strengths:

- Grassroots party with decentralised decision-making

- Functioning democratic mechanisms within the party and regular leadership rotation
- Focus on local-level politics, municipal deputies among party members

- ***Grassroots party with decentralised decision-making***

- ***Why did you choose the 5th of December Party?***

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Because it was created as a grassroots party...That's why I liked this party, because it was not leader-centric, any person can theoretically be elected to the party leadership through free elections, where all party members can vote."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"For example, in the 5th of December Party our Standing Committee has different elected members every time, every year. It never happens that the same group of people continuously sit on the Committee, so basically, any interested member can be elected, provided they are sufficiently active."*

Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor): *"The 5th of December Party was built on the basis of horizontal principles, which meant that we didn't have a single chairman or co-chairs."*

Weaknesses:

- Lack of financial and other resources, ineffectiveness of party activities
- Weak organisational structure
- Poor media presence, low level of recognition among the general public
- Low membership numbers

- ***Limited resources (human, financial, organisational) and a lack of stable party structure***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"The 5th of December Party is absolutely tiny, but its members are really proud [to call themselves a party], all five of them…"*

Interviewee 16 (member of Yabloko): *"[About the 5th of December Party and other small opposition parties] "These are not organisations that can demonstrate any significant results, these are social clubs...They don't exist as organisations. How many people are there in the 5th of December Party? How many regional branches do they have? Even if we include those simply sitting there and filing reports? They are non-existent. This is a very small group of people, and getting smaller, which simply bears the name of a party. With all due respect for their personal courage, their values and so on, this is not a party."*

Interviewee 18 (member of the Libertarian Party): *"Let's be honest, does the 5th of December Party really exist as a party at the moment? There are about twenty people, who have their personal [political] projects, and sometimes, when deemed necessary, they remember that they also have the 5th of December Party. But as a political structure, as an organization – they do not exist."*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"[About the 5th of December Party] I do not view them as a single organisation at the moment."*

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"The 5th of December Party – well, it had plenty of great people...but, to be honest, within the Russian [political] context...such decentralised democratic structures have no political future. I mean, they find it difficult to attract attention and resources in the absence of a clear leader, unfortunately. Our citizens, even the active ones, are less attracted to these seemingly better and healthier structures, compared to those that have a distinct [personality-related] brand – Yavlinsky, for example, or Navalny."*

Interviewee 6 (member of Parnas and the Solidarity movement): *"It makes sense to form a coalition with an organisation that has some resources: human or media, or financial, some other resource you can think of. The 5th of December Party doesn't have any of them."*

- ***Ineffectiveness***

Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor): *"Political activity in the 5th of December Party began to decline over time, so people were disappointed that nothing was going on...some internal arguments, disagreements started to emerge. I wouldn't have left the 5th of December Party had it not transformed into a kind of political discussion club over time, so it was no longer a party but a place where people gathered to talk, to discuss something and so on."*

Appendix 6.1: Local-level campaigns

- ***About the Moscow City Duma campaign in 2014***

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"For example, the attempt to unite prior to the Moscow City Duma election in 2014 wasn't very successful. Why? Because everyone was more focused on communications with each other, holding round tables, holding some other events, as opposed to real work on the ground. And those who worked on the ground – they could reach an agreement with each other."*

- ***About the Moscow municipal election campaign in 2017***

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"For example, if we are talking about recent successful projects – this was the municipal election [in 2017]. Absolutely everyone could reach an agreement with each other, representatives of all parties…that's why we managed to elect so many municipal deputies, because everyone could really negotiate and achieve an*

agreement…However, during other elections, such as Moscow mayoral elections, when we have to bet on one person – that's when all the splits happen. And the same situation with presidential elections."

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia):

"[About the Moscow municipal campaign in 2017]…at the same time, if you look at it, no one united with each other in the traditional sense – no one united people around one platform or programme. Rather, no one interfered with each other's work and it was already a success. There were several independent teams who were simultaneously organising systems aimed at providing electoral support to candidates."

"So everyone concentrated their efforts not around consolidation attempts but instead,…focused on the creation of truly important things – support systems for deputies."

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"...in 2017 there was a functioning central campaign team [in Yabloko], but it was counter-productive...our candidate wasted energy trying to neutralise their efforts."*

- ***About the Moscow City Duma election in 2019 (the signature collection stage of the campaign)***

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"…the effectiveness of the central [Yabloko] office is very low. For example, we have around 50-100 active signature-collectors, only approximately 5 of them were sent by the central office, despite the fact that they have a full-time worker in charge of the recruitment [of signature-collectors], who is receiving a regular salary…"*

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"A simple example: Yabloko…organised canvassing points in the centre [of Moscow] called 'We need your vote'…I passed them three times and the canvassers never came up to me…What does it mean? It means that they are paid by the hour and not according to the results. Therefore, they [Yabloko management] are wasting resources without any significant outputs. This is simply a managerial failure – allocating funds for something that does not bring any results. They could gather contacts [from passers-by], ask about their [home] addresses, come up to them and say: 'Hello, which district do you live in? Are you registered there? Do you know that there is an opposition candidate [in your district]? We can send a signature-collector to your area, who will take your signature. Please leave us your contact details.'"*

Appendix 6.2: Cost-benefit analysis

- ***Unclear benefits of merging with a smaller party***

Interviewee 16 (member of Yabloko): *"There are no parties that...would really be worth merging with at the moment because they are all tiny and non-functioning...In addition, this is technically unfeasible because we will ruin both structures and registering a new one is impossible at the moment – so we will all be left with nothing."*

Interviewee 6 (member of Parnas and the Solidarity movement): *"It makes sense to form a coalition with an organisation that has some resources: human or media, or financial, some other resource you can think of. The 5th of December Party doesn't have any of them."*

- ***Unclear benefits of merging with a registered party***

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"I just think that all these manipulations with party licenses will lead nowhere because if the authorities decide to prohibit participation in elections, they will do it regardless."*

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Moreover, it is unclear whether it makes sense for Navalny to unite [with a registered party] for the sake of its license because no one can guarantee that Navalny can preserve the license if he acquires it this way. It can be easily withdrawn, it's easy to liquidate a party."*

Appendix 6.3: The issue of party licensing

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"[About Civic Initiative/Party of Change] Nechayev's case, for example: he chairs some kind of party, which does not really exist, simply a registered something that has a party license, which he is constantly trying to sell".*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"Yabloko's party license, of course, will remain with Yavlinsky, there's no other way. He...will not let go of this license, I guarantee you this."*

Interviewee 12 (former member of the Progress Party): *"Party license has always been an issue. Parnas had a license and the Progress Party had people, opportunities, energy…the willingness to engage in politics. As I understand, the problem was related to the Parnas leadership, who were not willing to share [their party license]. If people [Progress Party members] had simply merged into Parnas, they would have been sidelined, this was unacceptable."*

Appendix 6.4: The fear of being absorbed by another political party

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Well, this [merger] is impossible because those leader-centric structures, if we merge into them, they will absorb us – meaning that we will not join any party leadership, there will be a single leader – like Kasyanov or Yavlinsky, or Slabunova."*

Interviewee 3 (former member of Yabloko, current member of DemVybor): *"...for example, when there were talks about merging with Yabloko, I strongly opposed this idea...they would not allow us to promote our ideas effectively and they would not reform their party, which means that we would have to give up our identity. Do we really need this? We would simply be absorbed…"*

Interviewee 1 (former member of the Progress Party): *"...I think that merging into Yabloko is pointless. Yabloko will simply absorb any reasonable endeavour."*

Appendix 6.5: The threat of a takeover

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"...for example, uniting with Navalny is always fatal for any party because Navalny would immediately become the main person there. This essentially means handing the party over to him, while you will always remain on the sidelines in this party."*

Interviewee 5 (member of the 5th of December Party and Open Russia): *"...if Nechayev [a leader of Civic Initiative], for example, decides to merge with the Progress Party, it is clear that Progress Party members will dominate, simply because of their numbers. They really have an active membership base, who will come and establish a voting majority and will vote for whatever is in their interest. Therefore, this will not be a merger but a takeover."*

Appendix 6.6: Disadvantages of a party merger

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"Look, a merger often generates very negative consequences. When corporations merge or, similarly, like schools and hospitals are being consolidated at the moment – this frequently diminishes the activity of the teams within each of these organisations. When you are trying to unite them...it results in both teams working less effectively."*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"I think a full merger should be avoided because it would destroy parties' unique identities and lead to stagnation. If we simply combine many diverse independent entities into one, there is no guarantee that it will result in a successful project."*

Interviewee 2 (member of the 5th of December Party and the Solidarity movement): *"If we had a normal democratic system now, like in the 1990s, we would be able to simply form electoral blocs and participate in elections as a bloc. But having independent parties – that's fine, this is a good approach, I think, to avoid any mergers because otherwise, there would definitely be discord and division and so on, we've gone through this many times."*

Interviewee 4 (former member of DemVybor, current member of Navalny's team): *"There is no need for everyone to unite…unity of the opposition for me is cooperation between people on particular projects. For example, when someone is running for election in some city, let's all help him in any way we can…perhaps, donate some money or maybe help by providing advice. But I don't see any point in everyone uniting within some joint organisations. I think the opposition should unite around particular [political] demands, around specific processes."*

Appendix 6.7: Inter-party cooperation at the activist level

Interviewee 17 (member of Yabloko – Katz's team): *"[The level of cooperation between different parties is] quite high, particularly in regions, where a person can be a member of a party, a member of an organization and work for a third [political force],*

all at the same time. For example, a member of Open Russia and the Yabloko party works for Navalny's campaign – this is a real case. In Moscow it's more difficult because here we have something to fight for."

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"[About the presidential campaign in 2018]…what is going on in the regions? Here in Moscow, Navalny and Sobchak can fight…tear each other apart, but campaign teams of Sobchak, Navalny, Golos, Parnas, whatever else that is there, Yabloko – in most regions it was essentially one team, the same set of people, volunteers. They joined forces simply because individually none of them had enough resources, in most regions...And meanwhile, here [in Moscow] there were storms: Navalny against Yavlinsky, Yavlinsky against Sobchak and so on."*

Interviewee 14 (member of Yabloko): *"At the activist level cooperation is far, far better…"*

Appendix 6.8: Coalition-building with participation of Alexey Navalny

Interviewee 8 (member of the Progress Party): *"…Navalny, being one of the most powerful opposition members, at present is, in fact, in the process of...clearing the opposition political arena...many of his and his team's actions are aimed at confronting other opposition politicians or potential politicians, who target the same electorate."*

Interviewee 10 (member of the Progress Party and the Solidarity movement): *"Navalny's political weight stands out to such an extent that he will suppress everyone else [within the coalition] or will somehow interfere with communication among others, in my opinion."*

Interviewee 9 (former member of the Progress Party and Navalny's team): *"[About Alexey Navalny] He has a very simple formula for success during elections: if none of my candidates are registered, this is automatically not a proper election. If Galiamina [the 5th of December Party candidate] is on the ballot, this is still not an election."*

Interviewee 6 (member of Parnas and the Solidarity movement): *"...some parties and some leaders of these parties proved their inability to reach agreements – Navalny, for example...he views himself as a single opposition leader and he is incapable of coming to an agreement with anyone at all."*

Interviewee 7 (former member of the 5th of December Party, Parnas and DemVybor): *"Navalny, as I see it, has adopted a scorched earth policy, meaning that he is not willing to share his resources and popularity with anyone. He is ready to take someone else's popularity and combine it with his own, but he won't share his resources with others. Much like Putin is pursuing a scorched earth policy in the general Russian political arena, Navalny is doing the same within the opposition – 'if not me, then who?'."*

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