



DEMOCRATIC CHOICE NEWSLETTER

Find out more at www.demchoice.ru/demchoice-english.htm

May 2015

“Democratic Choice” is one of the new political parties formed in Russia after the 2012 party legislation reform¹. The party was officially registered in September 2012 and became eligible for participation in elections in April 2013.

In the past three years, no federal elections have taken place, but we were able to secure certain representation at the local level. In a number of cases, this representation is significant:

- In Vladivostok, our party leader Yury Kuchin is the only member of the City Council who is not representing one of the “big four” federal parliamentary parties;
- In Novosibirsk, following the victory of the opposition coalition at Mayoral elections in April 2014, our party leader Sergey Dyachkov had secured a position of the Chairman of Committee on support of small and medium size entrepreneurs in the opposition-led Novosibirsk city administration.

The Novosibirsk city story is considered by us as extremely important. Novosibirsk is the 3rd biggest city of Russia after Moscow and St.Petersburg, and biggest Russian city east of Moscow. In 2014, a very wide range coalition was formed of very different opposition parties and groups to take on the ruling “United Russia” party monopoly in the Mayoral elections, and won – the “United Russia” candidate was defeated despite all involved election process irregularities and fraud. We consider this coalition-building a very important experience, and model to be replicated during the upcoming December 2016 State Duma elections.

Also, we consider the Novosibirsk experience quite important in terms of practicing a better governance by the opposition at the local level, which can be used as a model experience to be used in other regions, cities, and municipalities, as well as a practical illustration to voters that opposition can deliver better results for the average citizens as compared to the current “United Russia” political monopoly.

In Novosibirsk, the results in our specific area of governance were remarkable: according to official statistics, the number of small enterprises and microenterprises in the city have grown in 2014 by 13,6%, as opposed to just 1,7% Russia average and 1,4% in Moscow. Reasons for that are lowering the administrative barriers and establishment of a friendly atmosphere toward small entrepreneurs in the city².

¹ In 2004-2012, Russian political party legislation was very restrictive, no new parties were registered at that period (except for several new parties formed on the basis of mergers of older ones), and the overall number of registered political parties had reduced down to 7 – four “big” parties represented in the State Duma, including the ruling party “United Russia”, plus other three non-parliamentary parties. Starting from 2012, as a result of massive Russian political protests, the registration of new political parties was much eased, however, still remaining a problematic issue – some parties are rejected registration

It is essential to stress that “Democratic Choice” is very much a pro-small business party, our base has strong roots in small and medium size entrepreneurship, and lowering taxes and administrative barriers for small and medium size businesses is an absolute priority of our political platform. This is why governing experience in Novosibirsk, the 3rd biggest city in Russia, is extremely important for us as a practical testing ground for our pro-business political agenda.

In the most recent regional and local elections where we took part (in a number of regions in September 2014, on the so-called “single nationwide election day”) our results were not so great – we haven’t managed to secure any more representation in local authorities. However, the overall results of our candidates were quite decent – all of them had secured between 16% and 26% of popular support in their districts, some of them showing remarkable results, which makes them potentially very strong candidates for a single-mandate district elections of the State Duma members in 2016³. For instance, our party leader in the Central district of Khabarovsk, Alexey Vorsin, had received nearly 26% of the votes in his district at the City Council elections, coming far ahead of candidates from Communist party and other parliamentary parties, and losing only to a top “United Russia” candidate who is the owner of the main Khabarovsk river port.

Plans for 2015-2016 elections

In April 2015, “Democratic Choice” had announced joining the newly created coalition of the democratic opposition forces, which was established by the RPR-Parnas party chaired by ex-Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov (this was also the party of the late Boris Nemtsov, a prominent opposition politician who was murdered on February 27th in Moscow) and Party of Progress chaired by Alexey Navalny.

The new democratic coalition is based on the multi-party block principle, and had agreed to put forward united lists of candidates for the regional and local elections of 2015 (scheduled for September 13th in many regions), and, subsequently, for the State Duma elections of 2016. The coalition intends to use the 2015 regional election campaign as a build-up ground for gaining the 2016 federal election momentum. So far, three regions were chosen as a priority for 2015 – Novosibirsk, Kaluga and Kostroma (in all three, regional legislatures would be elected, plus some other elections would take place), where we assess the positions of coalition as the strongest.

“Democratic Choice” is clearly the third strongest party in the democratic coalition after the RPR-Parnas (Mikhail Kasyanov) and Party of Progress (Alexey Navalny), by strength of regional network, public presence and representation in the local authorities. We have also been ranked solidly within top 20 of the Russian political parties even by surveys of the pro-Kremlin think tanks⁴, and among top 5 in the democratic part of the spectrum, which puts us in strong positions among the potential “new cohort” of parties and leaders for the upcoming 2016 federal elections – although there still remains a lot of work to do.

² Read more about small businesses performance in Novosibirsk in 2014 (in Russian) here: <http://demchoice.ru/regions/novosibirsk-small-business>

³ In 2016 State Duma elections, authorities would re-introduce a mixed system when 50% of the Duma mandates are elected through single-mandate districts, and another 50% by proportional system (currently, 100% of the Duma seats are elected through proportional system)

⁴ See, for instance: http://www.isepr.ru/news/parties_rating/

One of the strongest political inputs to the democratic coalition we make is leading the development of coalition's political program and platform, where our leader, Vladimir Milov, plays key role with his economic and Government background⁵.

We are committed to work together with our partners to bring forth the success of the democratic coalition in the upcoming election campaigns.

Key events to watch in connection with the 2015 regional elections:

- Around June 20th – July 10th, 2015 – Election announcements in regions and submission of official candidate documents to elections commissions;
- September 13th, 2015 – Election day.

Our public presence

“Democratic Choice” is continuously maintaining its public presence as a strong party of professionals and ideas, thanks to the solid professional background of our team. Our leader, Vladimir Milov, is one of the most renowned Russian independent commentators on energy and economic issues, his opeds at Forbes Russia and other business and political editions are always well read and receive strong feedback.

We have also been very vocal on the tragic murder of the renowned opposition leader Boris Nemtsov: our leader Vladimir Milov had publicly expressed his views that Russian security services were most likely involved the murder, and had made an official open inquiry to the Russian security services (including the FSB) with 12 specific questions regarding their alleged involvement in the murder.

Our party newspaper, “Free Speech”, had become an important source of free information for people in many different regions and municipalities of Russia in the environment of the tightening information blockade and censorship by the authorities. In our approach, we try to use our newspaper as a main important source of information on local issues and problems for the local residents, promoting our regional candidates, instead of just focusing on general ideological issues – such pragmatic approach generates large demand for our newspapers, which have been over the past months issued in many different Russian regions from Krasnodar to Khabarovsk.

International cooperation

“Democratic Choice”, a party of centre-right and strong pro-European positions, had been strengthening the ties with its main European partner, the European Peoples Party (EPP). In February 2015, our youth wing, “Youth Democratic Choice”, have been officially granted observer membership at European Democrat Students, EPP's student wing. This Summer and fall, our party is expected to take part in series of EPP's important events.

Our leader, Vladimir Milov, is also very much in demand as a speaker at important international fora, commenting not only on the Russian situation, but also on important global issues as well. Despite the fact that Mr. Milov tries his best to spend most of his time in Russia helping to promote our basic political goals and work with grass roots here, he

⁵ See, for instance, the video of the coalition briefing of April 22nd to get an overall understanding of our key political ideas at the moment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO5q7zST-Hc>

still was able to deliver important speeches at renowned international conferences and institutions, which, over the past six months, have included:

- Halifax International Security Forum, Halifax;
- Columbia University in New York;
- Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC;
- Lennart Meri Conference, Tallinn;
- Institut français des relations internationales, Paris.

We are committed to continuing the important cooperation with our Euro-Atlantic friends and partners, spreading the message of hope for future democratic changes in Russia, and bringing Russia back into its European family.

Photos: "Democratic Choice" at the opposition rally remembering Boris Nemtsov in Moscow on March 1st, 2015 (top); "Democratic Choice" at the Peace March against the war with Ukraine in September 2014 (bottom)

