Chapter 8

The Local Barons under Putin's Moderate Feudalism (2000–2006)

Introduction

With Putin's rise to power, Russia entered a new phase in its history. Putin strengthened his position at the expense of the local barons, whose national power declined though their authority remained strong in their own regions. The same trend could be seen in the Middle Ages as the royal power strengthened and the level of arbitrariness and chaos in the country diminished. This happened, for instance, during "the Caroling renewal" following the rule of the last Merovingian king in the eighth century. It was Charlemagne (768–814) who restored the power of the central administration by demanding, among other things, an oath of fidelity from the local lords. Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's son, introduced in the early ninth century the official term "res publica" as a sign of the preponderance of the interests of the state over private ones.[1]

Putin Restrains Local Barons

Putin's first steps as president were devoted to restraining the power of the local barons and oligarchs. The population was mostly ambivalent toward the relations between the Kremlin and local autocrats. In 2006, according to a survey by the Fund of Public Opinion, one-third of the population endorsed their local leaders, one-third was indifferent toward them, and 17 percent disliked them. At the same time, 52 percent of the Russians were dissatisfied with the state of

affairs in their regions, and almost the same number believed that local leaders systematically violated the law.[2] With such mixed attitudes toward governors and presidents, Putin could hardly expect to meet resistance to his decisions to curtail their political role.

Putin proved that he was capable of undermining the power of any of his potential rivals and not only of politicians in Moscow, such as the liberal Grigorii Yavlinsky, the Communist Gennadii Ziuganov, and oligarchs such as Berezovskii, Gusinskii, and Khodorkovsky. He also ousted local barons including the Kursk governor Aleksandr Rutskoi and the Petersburg governor Vladimir Yakovlev. Although Putin did not follow suit with the presidents of non-Russian republics, he did weaken their role in national politics. Putin also curbed Yurii Luzhkov's arrogance, and by the first years of the new millennium the Moscow boss had been reduced to an obedient feudal baron.

Evgenii Nazdratenko, governor of the Maritime Territory (Far East), was also quite insolent toward the Kremlin during the 1990s. All of Moscow's attempts to dislodge him, particularly Chubais' endeavors in 1996, had failed. But Putin solved the problem by ousting Nazdratenko from his position as governor and bringing him to serve in a position in Moscow.

Until 2004, several governors and presidents of non-Russian republics, such as Nikolai Fedorov from Chuvashiia, could express their views even if these contrasted with Putin's. Soon, however, challenges to Putin's authority by local governors or republican presidents totally disappeared. After the terrorist attacks in 2004 on a high school in Beslan (in North Ossetiia), the president cancelled the election of governors and began to appoint them instead. Putin's move eliminated the last relatively independent institution in the country. The governors could no longer assert themselves as "elected leaders."[3]

THE DECLINE OF THE FEDERATION COUNCIL

In 1993, in order to ingratiate with local leaders, Yeltsin had created the Federation Council, a body consisting of regional leaders. Whereas the regional bosses saw this body as a new institution that could effectively run the country, unlike the inept Parliament and the government, the president saw it as an antidote to the increasingly rebellious Parliament.

The first meeting of this council, whose existence was not stipulated in the acting constitution, took place in September 1993, on the eve of a direct confrontation between the president and the Parliament. It was evident that Yeltsin, attempting to exploit the local

barons in his fight against his Moscow opponents, wanted to replace the Parliament, the instrument of his foes, with this new body, to which he had personally appointed a significant number of members. At the same time, feeling their powers growing, local leaders, Russian and non-Russian alike, went so far as to demand that future presidents be elected from among their ranks. It looked as if Russian governors wanted to follow the example of the Holy Roman Empire in the Middle Ages when German princes elected the emperor. One of Putin's first actions as president was to radically change the role of the Federation Council and exclude the governors from any serious role in national politics.

Making the Federation Council a ceremonial organ, Putin appointed his myrmidon Sergei Mironov as its head. Mironov was ready to take on any task for his boss, including the rather bizarre role as Putin's fictitious challenger in the presidential election of 2004. During the election campaign, Mironov actually supported Putin. He was also among the courtiers who proposed changing the constitution in order to provide Putin the possibility of a third term.

Presidential Emissaries

Before discussing Putin's presidential emissaries, let us return to the Middle Ages. In order to offset the power of the local administrations, Charlemagne extended the use of *missi dominici*—that is, envoys who served as liaisons between the central government and local agents and who were responsible for keeping the latter in line. To strengthen his control over the population, Charlemagne attempted to develop intermediary bodies and use both vassalage and immunity as means of government—in the first instance by creating royal vassals and giving them control of public offices, and in the second by controlling protected institutions such as monasteries and the Jewish community.

Using similar maneuvers, Putin created an institution of interregional envoys to supervise the seven interregional districts in order to curb the power of the local barons. He signaled his determination to place each governor and president of non-Russian republics under the control of his emissaries. The major task of this new institution was to make the local laws compatible with federal laws and first of all with the constitution. There was no doubt that the presidential emissaries made some progress in unifying the law on the territory of the Russian Federation. However, in the opinion of most experts, they did not seriously curtail the power of local governors or the presidents of non-Russian republics.[4]

The case of Dmitrii Kozak is particularly interesting. With a reputation as one of the best of Putin's administrators, he was appointed as an emissary in the South District, which included the North Caucasian region. However, he clearly was unable to even superficially curb the arbitrariness and corruption of the local barons. He had almost no influence on the conduct of the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, or the Dagestan rulers, or the president of Adygei, Khazret Sovmen.[5]

Contrary to Putin's pledge to enforce social order and federal laws across the country, the Kremlin allowed the regional leaders to act like feudal lords as long as they demonstrated loyalty to the Kremlin and remained ready to support Putin against his rivals. Putin almost never removed a governor for improper or illegal actions committed in the governor's own territory. As described by various sources, the governors who were forced out by Putin had shown disloyalty or were deemed untrustworthy.

Why the Moscow "Tsar" Gave So Much Power to Local Barons

Having pushed the local governors and presidents out of national politics, Putin did not, however, attempt to control their actions inside their own regions. An expert on Russian domestic politics contended, perhaps with some exaggeration, that none of Putin's edicts were taken seriously by the governors.[6] There were several explanations for why Putin did not interfere in the internal life of the regions and republics and in many cases tolerated the arbitrariness of the local barons.

The Lack of a Loyal and Effective Apparatus

Putin did not have a state apparatus or political instrument like the Communist Party of the past that could supervise the implementation of Moscow's policies in the provinces.[7] The replacement of one local leader by another did not lead to a serious change in the state of corruption or criminality in a region. The substitution of Nazdratenko with Sergei Darkin in the Maritime Territory, for instance, did not improve the political climate in the region. Both were deeply corrupted officials with direct links to the organized crime in the region.

The Special Support of Presidents of Non-Russian Republics

In its attempts to create order in society, the Kremlin supported any leader in non-Russian republics who could maintain order, turning a blind eye to their egregious violations of law. This policy reflected the conviction that Moscow was unable, as it was in the Soviet times, to maintain order in the non-Russian republics, given the high level of local nationalism. While many non-Russian republics learned the lesson from the bloody repressions in Chechnya, the Kremlin also realized that even if Chechnya could be pacified with immense effort and financial resources, the same could not be done with all the other republics if these republics decided to challenge Moscow. For this reason, Putin's Kremlin did not abandon Yeltsin's feudal policy of securing special agreements between Moscow and the republics, which stipulated various issues, including taxes and the state languages.[8]

At the same time, the Kremlin allowed the leaders of non-Russian republics to act quite freely within their territories. For instance, Mintimer Shaimiev was allowed to do almost everything he wanted inside the Tatar Republic on the condition that he did not challenge the Kremlin or the major corporations it protected. Understanding Shaimiev's problems with local nationalists and even Muslim extremists,[9] the Kremlin permitted Shaimiev to treat Tatarstan in its constitution as a "state" and "subject of international law." The Kremlin also allowed its residents to keep a special page in their passports that contained Tatarstan's official insignias and recognized Tatar (along with Russian) as a state language.[10] The Tatarstan authorities often ignored the federal constitution. Kazan created its own Tatar postal system to serve inside the republic. Telephone communication was also under the control of the local authorities. Reviewing these developments, a Moscow journalist noted, "The republic has its own communication company, its own oil and its own energy system and now its own postal service. It is evident that Tatarstan is slowly but consistently turning into a new state."[11]

The Kremlin, despite its support of the Russian nationalist ideology, turned a blind eye to the discrimination of the ethnic Russians (and other ethnic groups) living in non-Russian republics.[12] This was in stark contrast with the Soviet policy from the early 1930s until 1985, which promoted Russification in all the national republics and made sure that the leading positions in the party and state apparatus, as well as in culture and education, were held by ethnic Russians. Moscow cruelly punished anyone who even remotely undermined the

leading role of the Russians, the so-called senior brothers, in the regions.

Discrimination was seen in the hiring and firing practices and in the various benefits given to people who knew the local language. Ethnic discrimination was quite strong in almost all non-Russian republics. In Chechnya, due in part to the war, the proportion of ethnic Russians decreased by eight times between 1989 and 2002; in Daghestan, by two times; in North Osetiia, by 29 percent; and in Kabardin-Balkar Republic, by 27 percent.[13]

The Kremlin did not object to the fact that some leaders of non-Russian republics ruled their territories like fiefs over many years and suppressed any challenge to their position, using various means including violence.[14] In many cases, Putin did not use his power, which he acquired in 2004, to replace old presidents with new ones. He even persuaded them to stay in power—for instance, in the case of Shaimiev, the Tatar president, whose third term expired in 2006.[15] Indeed, Putin allowed Shaimiev to hold his position as the Tatar president for four terms in a row. During practically the same period, President Murtaza Rakhimov reigned in Bashkortostan and President Kirsan Iliumzhinov in Kalmykiia.

Kadyrov's Case

A good example of the Kremlin's need to rely on feudal lords in non-Russian republics was the case of Chechnya, which represents a clear parallel to the Middle Ages. Unable to pacify the rebellious republic after years of war, Putin assigned Akhmet Kadyrov in 2000 as a boss with almost unrestricted power. After Kadyrov was murdered in 2004, his position was taken over by his son Ramzan. Relying only on his clan, while ignoring federal laws and resorting to unrestrained violence against anyone who resisted, Ramzan Kadyrov was indeed able to install some level of order in the republic. Russian journalists talked about Chechnya as "leased by Moscow to Kadyrov," a pure feudal case.[16] Expecting political loyalty from the local bosses, Putin was tolerant toward most aspects of their conduct inside Chechnya, particularly when it came to corruption and nepotism. What is more, Yuliia Latynina, a prominent journalist who followed the developments in Chechnya for several years, suggested in her article "One Day with the Master of Chechnya" that the relations between Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov were in some ways reversed. It was Putin who paid a "levy" to Kadyrov for maintaining order in Chechnya. Putin permitted Kadyrov to control the revenues from locally produced oil and

the federal budget. He made him almost independent from the federal authorities, including the federal troops stationed in Chechnya.[17]

What the Moscow Suzerain Expected from His Barons

Social Order in the Regions

The local bosses were called on to release the president from various obligations. This was the policy of Putin's government in 2003–2006 when, trying to reform its programs for welfare, health services, and real estate management, it tried to hold the regions responsible for satisfying the population's basic needs. Many experts saw the notorious benefits reform of early 2005 as an indication of the Kremlin's plan to shift social responsibility (medical and transportation in the first place) onto the shoulders of the local administrators, knowing fully well that regions' budgets were insufficient for performing these functions.[18]

The Kremlin tended to appoint wealthy individuals as new governors, hoping that they would use their personal resources to improve life in the regions, as demonstrated by the case of Roman Abramovich, the governor of Chukotka. One Russian journalist wrote in 2005 that "[t]he center has shifted the responsibility for solving the complicated problems in the regions on the newly appointed leaders, relying on their personal financial resources and connections in political circles and the state apparatus."[19] It was obvious that such an approach deeply contradicted Putin's attempts to centralize management in the country.[20]

The Importance of Loyalty in Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

The Russian governors were expected to deliver a majority of the votes in the presidential and parliamentary elections in favor of the ruling leader. The governors and presidents of non-Russian republics were obliged to support the president in all his domestic and foreign actions. The collection of votes had already been established as the major obligation of the local barons under Yeltsin. Indeed, in 1996, the Kremlin expected governors and presidents to do everything they could to get Yeltsin reelected in 1996. The Kremlin demanded that the local barons be ready to rig the elections. The bosses in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and several other regions did, in fact, rig the elections in

order to guarantee Yeltsin's victory in the second round, because, as demonstrated by the first round of the election, Gennadii Ziuganov, the Communist candidate, had a significant lead and should have been elected as president.[21]

It was remarkable that the president of the Chuvash Republic, Nikolai Fedorov, submitted his resignation to Yeltsin (though it was not accepted), because he had not been able to fulfill his duty of ensuring Yeltsin's victory in his territory.[22]

As suggested by Sergei Dorenko, a prominent Russian journalist, "[W]e live under feudalism"; the governors can do whatever they want, so long as they support the presidential party and guarantee successful results in the parliamentary and presidential elections.[23]

The Center's Indifference toward Local Corruption

If the governors and presidents showed their loyalty to the Kremlin, the center remained indifferent toward their efforts to enrich themselves and their relatives and friends. Governors in Putin's Russia were similar to the German ministerials (lower-ranking knights in the Middle Ages with temporary positions at a prince's court) who tried to accumulate wealth whenever possible. This was not, however, an easy task because land was the most important asset and it was totally controlled by the feudal lords. In post-Soviet Russia, the task was much easier because money played the leading role in political and economic life.

The Russian newspaper *Kommersant-Daily* analyzed 11 cases of criminal acts committed by governors between 1996 and 2006 (nine of the cases occurred after 2000 when Putin became president). None of the 11 governors were incarcerated for even one day. Either the accusations against them were found to be unsubstantiated or the accused governors were saved from prison by amnesty.[24]

In 2006, the Kremlin initiated some judicial actions against a few governors and mayors, including the governor of the Nenets Region Aleksei Barinov and Volgorgrad's mayor Evgenii Ishchenko, but these actions did not change the general climate of tolerance toward the corruption of the local bureaucracy.[25] In some rare cases, governors and mayors were prosecuted for their corrupt activities as a result of the conflicts among local political elites, or because of the discontent of the Kremlin with a particular local politician for reasons not related to corruption.[26]

There were different ways to accumulate fortunes, aside from direct embezzlements of state money. Most importantly, governors and

republican presidents had tremendous power over local businesses. As a rule, no company could function if the head of the administration was hostile toward it. As Yuliia Latynina noted, "If a governor was replaced by another, any company, aside from those controlled by oligarchs, could lose its factory on the territory of the region." As an example, she discussed the plight of the company Renova, which lost its electrode factory in Novosibirsk when Governor Vitalii Mukha was replaced by Viktor Tolokonskii, who was friendly toward a rival company called TWG.[27] The local Russian barons were particularly active in regions like the Far East and Siberia that possessed rich natural resources, oil and gas in particular. These resources attracted foreign investment—an important asset for rent-seeking activity. It was easier for governors to generate illegal income from oil and gas companies than from the embezzlement of budget money.[28]

Among other devices that governors used to enrich themselves, or their relatives and friends, was to make some private company, without any form of bidding, responsible for providing various services to city dwellers. For example, in Krasnoiarsk, Governor Aleksandr Khloponin forced the public to pay the real estate company Kraskom, which was under his protection, for providing maintenance services in their apartment complexes. In order to increase the income of this company, the governor increased the maintenance payment in 2006 by 30 percent, while the national rate of increase was only 20 percent. The action infuriated the residents of the city, but no actions were taken, because Moscow supported the governor in this case.[29]

In some situations, the local bureaucracy, under the guidance of the governor, created a sort of mafia that established rules for its activities. It enriched itself collectively with regular bribes and embezzlements. A good example was seen in the Orlov Region, which was ruled by Governor Yegor Stroev for 15 years. Corruption was prevalent during the entire period of Stroev's governorship. In 2006, the level of corruption rose to the surface when Moscow moved to fight it. In April 2006, several dozen leading officials, including former deputy governors and former mayors, were detained and accused of taking bribes. The officials in Orlov had organized a group that collected bribes in a common pool, as criminal organizations do, and then distributed the money according to the position of each group member. All these people, as noted in a Moscow newspaper, "felt totally immune to prosecution for many years."[30] At the same time, Stroev was not harmed by "the pogrom" of bureaucrats in Orel.[31] Stroev also made his daughter a Russian senator, which did not surprise many people in the region.[32]

The situation in Chukotka was similar to that in Orel. The region was mostly ruled by Governor Abramovich's people from Moscow and other cities in the European part of Russia. All of the major positions in the bureaucracy were given to the relatives and friends of high officials. These people usually only worked for one to two years, collected their money, and moved back to their original places to avoid exposing themselves to criminal activity in the region.[33] The officials themselves raised their personal salaries to astronomical levels and paid little attention to their duties. Instead, they entertained themselves with expensive parties, hunting expeditions, and sexual activities.

A typical strategy used by governors and mayors for personal enrichment was to create government funds that were not controlled by the local legislators. For instance, the governor of Belgorod Evgenii Savchenko created the "extra budget fund," which was generated mostly by "donations" from local businesses. It was completely outside the control of the local legislators. He also established fictitious public institutions that were financed by the state budget but controlled by Savchenko himself.[34]

When the mayor of Volgograd Evgenii Ishchenko was incarcerated in July 2006, the public learned that he was the owner of an airplane and a yacht worth 3 million euros, which he kept in Monaco. On the eve of his arrest, he negotiated the purchase of one of the Maldives Islands. His luxurious apartment in Volgograd cost $500,000, yet his official salary was only $18,000 per year. As soon as he became mayor, Ishchenko began to protect his own company, Souzneftegazstroi. This corporation created a new firm called Tamerlan, which ran a building operation, and the mayor provided it with the best municipal land.

The Case of Boos

Georgii Boos belonged to Putin's cohort of feudal barons. He was appointed as the governor of Kaliningrad Region by Putin after the president canceled the election procedure for governors. Many people in the region expected the new governor to change the deeply corrupt and criminalized climate in the region. Their expectations were indeed wrong. Under Boos, the judicial system remained as corrupt as it was in the past. His spouses and children worked simultaneously as judges, prosecutors, and lawyers. Ordinary people were completely defenseless. Boos invited Moscow businesspeople to work with him in Kaliningrad. Local businesspeople were also invited to cooperate with the new administration if they did what the governor

expected from them. If they did not cooperate with the administration and were not eager to send money to it for "social projects," they were harassed by the Prosecutor General's Office, which could easily find a way to send them to jail. In this corrupt climate, the election of local legislators became a complete farce.[35]

Local Barons and Criminality

Putin displayed indifference not only toward the corruption of local barons but also toward their direct connections with criminals. In 2000–2006, the Moscow media published numerous articles about the arbitrariness of local barons, the recruitment of their cadres (based on commercial interests), their connections with criminals, and their successful war against the independent media, which included the murder of journalists.[36]

Sergei Darkin, appointed by Putin as the governor of the Maritime Territory, was a good example. Darkin was denounced many times by the Russian media as a person who maintained, in spite of his new position, criminal connections.[37] One of Darkin's close confidants, Yurii Kopylov, who also had a long criminal record, was with Putin at the prestigious meeting in Moscow on the eve of the presidential election as a leading activist in Putin's party, "United Russia"; he was later elected as the mayor of Vladivostok in July 2004 and finally arrested in 2006 for criminal deeds.[38]

The criminal record of Dmitrii Fotianov was common knowledge in his native city, Dalnegorsk, in the Far East, but his record did not dissuade the ruling party, "United Russia," from helping him get elected as the mayor of this city in 2005 and support him in the mayoral election of 2006. As it turned out, it was not the party but his colleagues in the local mafia who put an end to his political career by killing him on the eve of the election.[39]

The immunity of the local and central elites to criminal prosecution became a fixture of life in the post-Soviet period and a clear reminder of the situation in the Middle Ages. A typical example could be seen in the exemptions these people received when they got involved in car accidents, even when the collision resulted in death. For instance, in August 2006, the mayor of Piatigorsk, a city in North Caucasus, in an obvious case of reckless driving, killed five people. Yet, in the face of decisive evidence, he was practically exonerated from any liability in the case. In 2006, the son of the minister of defense Sergei Ivanov, in a similar case, killed an old woman in Moscow and went free from any civil or criminal case in court.[40]

Arbitrariness toward the Population

As governors and presidents were useful people to Putin, their power over the local population was rarely checked. In many respects, their independence from Moscow was greater than during the Brezhnev period, even if the regional party secretaries had been quite free to do as they pleased during Soviet times as well. However, the Soviet people could complain to Moscow, and in some cases they even won their case against the local authorities. This was not the case under Putin. When the system of supervision over the local administration disappeared, the residents of the regions were totally helpless before the local leaders. Only the media could help local residents, though the freedom of the press was weak in post-Soviet Russia and particularly weak in the provinces. In short, the chances for provincial victims to voice their complaints were very low. By 2006, only a few liberal newspapers in Moscow—*Novaia Gazeta* in the first place, with its modest circulation (less than 100,000)—continued to publish critical articles about life in the provinces.

Kirsan Iliumzhinov, the president of Kalmykiia, one of the poorest regions in the country with 50 percent of its people unemployed, once boasted to an American journalist that he built with his "personal money" 38 Buddhist temples, 22 Orthodox churches, a Polish catholic cathedral (the only one of its kind in the republic), a mosque, and a luxurious chess palace that cost him $40 million.[41]

The opposition in the republic had been severely persecuted. A prominent journalist who was critical of the regime was murdered.[42] Iliumzhinov turned the republic into his own fief. While the population remained extremely poor, he turned Elista, the administrative center of the republic, into the "chess capital" of the world. He paid Bobby Fisher, a former world chess champion and an exotic personality, 100,000 dollars as a sign of his "personal recognition of his contribution to chess." He issued an executive order that placed chess in the curriculum in the first three grades of school. The total arbitrariness of the presidents in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan was also well known in the country.[43]

Local Barons and Democracy

The governors, almost without exception, became enemies of democracy with the Kremlin's full consent. Before 2005, the governors had been "elected," though in most cases a victory at the polls was gained with blatant populism and the cynical use of the local bureaucratic

apparatus, as well as with the support of businesses and even some criminal structures.

In those regions where the candidates for the position of governor were incumbents, the elections were comparable to those carried out in Soviet times.[44] The most shameful were the elections to the Moscow Duma. Moscow major Luzhkov, in blatant violation of the law, was directly involved in the election process and managed to block certain candidates from entering the elections. What is more, there were serious doubts about the validity of the Moscow elections in 1997. However, because Luzhkov had a great deal of control over all Moscow political institutions, it was almost impossible to file complaints.[45] The abolishment of gubernatorial elections in 2004 only increased the governors' and republican presidents' contempt for democracy and decreased their concern about the attitudes of the people toward their activities.

It was only natural that in most regions, particularly in the national republics, the leaders of the provinces reduced the role of the local parliament to almost zero. In most places, the provincial leaders held strict control (reminiscent of the Soviet era) over the elections in the local Dumas to ensure complete obedience. This practice started in the second half of the 1990s and continued under Putin when Moscow demonstrated total indifference toward the observation of election laws in the provinces.[46] Sergei Darkin, governor of the Maritime Region, filled nearly the entire list of candidates of the governmental party "United Russia" with people from his close circle. Darkin's actions aroused anger among the leaders of the party in Moscow who were forced to acquiesce to the governor's arrogance.[47] Eduard Rossel, governor of Ekaterinburg, also manipulated the elections in his parliament. He did not allow, for instance, certain parties to participate in the elections.[48]

The Lack of Freedom of the Press

In the 1990s, the freedom of local media was quite high. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, media freedom in the provinces was curtailed significantly. The Kremlin remained indifferent toward the issue and never defended the press. According to the Fund for the Defense of Glasnost, in 2006, none of the 89 regions in Russia could claim to have completely free media. In three-quarters of the regions, media were rated as "relatively" or "completely" "not free." The freedom of media was absent in 19 of 21 national republics (the Chuvash and Altai republics were exceptions).[49] The

debates on this issue, which the Public Chamber carried out in Kazan in November 2006, were indicative in this respect. Nikolai Svanidze, a member of the RF Public Chamber, named specific regions in which the freedom-of-speech situation was abominable. These regions included Mary-El, Bashkortostan, and Saratov.[50] The arrests and murders of journalists became a fixture in many Russian regions, particularly non-Russian republics. The arrests of the Bashkir journalist Viktor Shmakov in May 2006 and the journalist Vladimir Korolev from Perm in September 2006 became known to the local public only because the media in Moscow covered the story.[51] Pavel Gusev, the editor of *Moskovskii Komsomolets,* talked on the radio station *Ekho Moskvy* about the dozens of local journalists working for his newspaper who were beaten, arrested, or murdered, or simply disappeared from their homes in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century.[52]

The Cult of Local Leaders

Feudal elements in the regional governments were also seen in the cult status of the local leaders. They were awarded various titles and prizes. For instance, the president of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev, who served four terms in office, was awarded The Kind Angel of Peace prize, an award in a journalism competition, a medal for achievements in chemistry, and a medal in commemoration of the October Revolution. Shaimiev's seventieth anniversary was celebrated in the republic as an official holiday. Shaimiev was greeted during his jubilee by Putin and dozens of other dignitaries.[53] The president of the Udmurt Republic Aleksandr Volkov received the medal "Statehood" (*Derzhava*) and the titles "Outstanding Builder," "Outstanding Engineer," "Outstanding Worker of Public Transportation," and "Honored Academician." The president of Chuvashia Nikolai Fedorov also received dozens of medals and titles.[54]

Conclusion

By 2004–2005, a new balance of power emerged between the Kremlin and the local barons. The governors and presidents of non-Russian republics abandoned their previous roles as active politicians in the national policy arena, but preserved their control over their respective regions. The leaders of the regions were autocratic rulers appointed by the president, who almost completely ignored democratic principles. They ran their regions like fiefs in the same authoritarian way as

Putin ran the whole country. The feudal model, with its focus on polycentrism, is the best instrument for describing the relations between the central administration and the periphery of the country. Neither the liberal model, which supposes the existence of democratic elections, nor the totalitarian model, which supposes an almost absolute control of the center over the provinces, can be used for this purpose.