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**Концептуализация партийной структуры
«Единой России»: опыт реализации
универсальной модели в регионах**

**Conceptualization of the party structure of
"United Russia": experience in the
implementation of the universal model in the
regions**

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Аннотация. Особое значение для отечественной политической науки и партийной политики имеют вопросы, связанные с осмыслением особенностей функционирования современной российской партии власти «Единой России». Автор считает, что осмысление особенностей функционирования «Единой России» невозможно без теоретической концептуализации её партийной структуры. Основным методом исследования выступил прикладной политологический анализ: моделирование, контент-анализ партийных материалов, статистический анализ, ситуационный анализ, анализ партийных документов и официальных нормативно-правовых актов, неформализованные экспертные интервью. Также автор использует сведения, полученные и обобщённые в ходе включенного наблюдения. В настоящей статье автор концептуализирует универсальную модель партийной структуры «Единой России» и на примере региональных отделений в Ставропольском крае и Ростовской области показывает, как она функционирует. Автор выделяет три уровня внутрипартийного устройства «Единой России» и раскрывает их значение.

Ключевые слова: политические партии, партийная структура, региональное отделение, «Единая Россия», универсальная модель

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Abstract. Of particular importance for the domestic political science and partisan politics are issues related to understanding the features of the modern political party "United Russia". The author believes that understanding the features of the functionality of "United Russia" is impossible without a theoretical conceptualization of its party structure. The research method was compiled by applied political science analysis: modeling, content analysis of party materials, statistical analysis, situational analysis, analysis of party documents and basic legal acts, non-formalized expert interviews. The author also uses information obtained and summarized during the included observation. In this article, the author conceptualizes the universal model structure of United Russia and presents the representative part in the Stavropol Territory and the Rostov Region, as it is composed. The author identifies three levels of the intra-party structure of United Russia and reveals their significance.

Keywords: political party, party structure, regional branch, "United Russia", universal model

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Introduction. The ambiguous political and economic changes that began at the end of the last century with the collapse of the Soviet Union and continue to this day in the Eurasian space, and above all in Russia, are largely due to the transformation of the party system of the USSR. The existing party system in Russia was formed only 30 years ago. The previous party systems: royal Russia and the Soviet Union were completely dismantled. The basis of modern party building is a multi-party system. But at the same time, the presence of a dominant party that stabilizes the system and prevents a parliamentary crisis is critical. The refusal of the CPSU from a leading political role led to the collapse of a large state, this allows us to judge the role played by the Communist Party in state building [9, p. 16]. The collapse of the Soviet Union was largely due to the fact that both the political elite and citizens underestimated this role.

Materials and research methods. Issues devoted to the party structure occupy a special place in the theory of parties. Research on this topic reveals the organizational and, as a result, functional features of specific political parties. Among the most significant works for this study, which reveal issues of party organizational structure, are the works of the following authors: M. Duverger, S. Lipset, S. Rokkan, A. Panebianco, T. Poguntke, J.T. Ishiyama, B.A. Isaev, A.N. Chekansky, A.N. Shishkin. It is important to note that the conclusion made by S. Lipset and S. Rokkan more than half a century ago that theoretical party theory knows much more about the sociocultural basis and history of participation in the political decision-making process of political parties than about their internal management and organizational functioning remains relevant this day [10, p.48].

Several general theoretical remarks need to be made regarding party structure. As G. Simon points out, a formal organization, namely the party structure, is understood as “a model of behavior and relationships that is intentionally and legally planned for members of the organization” [6, p. 74]. Developing this idea in relation to the party structure as a formal organization, it is necessary to focus on the basic characteristic inherent in parties as a political institution in the form of mandatory goal setting to achieve and retain power. From this point of view, in the party structure exclusively patterns of behavior and relationships are formed that are “aimed at ascertaining the desires of voters, acquiring loyal supporters and representing these interests in the political process” [1, p. 161]. Domestic political scientists point to stability as a constitutive factor of a party organization, which is “a certain set or association of people that maintains a certain stability” [4, p. 113].

It is also important to make a few specific theoretical remarks regarding party structure. As M. Duverger points out, the final structure of any party is influenced by its genesis [2, p. 33]. From this position it logically follows that the structure of each party is unique and not similar to the structures of other parties [2, p. 60]. The direct relationship between the process of party formation and its structure is due to the specificity of endogenous and exogenous factors of partogenesis. We can say that the crystallization of the party structure occurs under the influence of external and internal conditions. One of the most important conditions is the range of tasks facing the party. From this point of view, the structure of parties is determined by the range of political tasks, which in a broad sense must be understood as the functions of a specific party in the political system of the country. “In some situations, party policy can only be implemented through a strictly centralized structure, the simultaneous and coordinated action of all party organizations and all party members. In other cases, on the contrary, the diversity of local conditions may require maximum consideration of just such conditions, and excessive centralization and strict discipline give a negative result, weaning party members from initiative and creative search for non-standard solutions” [4, p. 115].

Research results and their discussion. Summarizing the general and specific theoretical remarks regarding the party structure, we can say the following: it is a stable organization in the form of a set of party elements and the interaction between them, which are determined by the goals of achieving and maintaining power, as well as other political functions of the party as a structural element of the country's political system. It is important to note that, apparently, the correlation between the structure and functions of a party is strengthened in the case of not

spontaneous institutionalization of the party, but thoughtful partogenesis, when the party is designed to implement special functions within the political system. As M. Duverger writes, ultimately it is the nature of “the basic elements of the party that determines the strength or weakness of the party structure” [2, p.90]. This must be understood as the degree of suitability of party elements for implementing the functions of the political system: the less suitable the party elements are for performing the functions assigned to the party by the political system, the less suitable the party is for a given political system, which means its structure can be characterized as weak.

Therefore, Duverger's remark regarding the influence of genesis on the structure of the party is especially true in relation to United Russia. This is a successful example of a hand-made batch. The emergence of United Russia as the party in power was due, firstly, to the need to stabilize the parliamentary process in Russia at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Secondly, the need for the emergence of mechanisms for consolidating the regional and local political elite around the strategic course of the head of state [7, p. 157]. Therefore, the conceptualization of the party structure of “United Russia” is a tool for understanding the role of “United Russia” in the modern Russian political system, as a consciously designed political institution for the implementation of specific functions. The internal structure of the United Russia party is determined by the functions performed and its role in the political system of the country and in the political systems of the regions.

The formalization of the party structure and strict legal regulation of party functioning not only in Russia, but throughout the world are due to the need to comply with “the procedure that guarantees the legality of the nomination of candidates” [3, p. 83]. From this point of view, the formalization of the party structure is the basis for the functioning of the party, a kind of prerequisite for the implementation of functions. At the same time, M. Duverger writes that “statutes and internal regulations always describe only an insignificant part of reality, if they describe reality at all; after all, in practice they are rarely followed strictly” [2, p.19]. Therefore, the conceptualization of the party structure of “United Russia” should occur at the intersection of the study of the provisions of legal acts and official party documents and the analysis of the real political process. The dichotomy of formal and informal institutions when studying the party structure of United Russia must be overcome by analyzing the implementation of legal regulations in the political practice of party building.

The basis for conceptualizing the party structure of “United Russia” is the following concepts: a universal model of party structure and levels of internal party structure, party organization, its levels and branches, as well as the very concept of party structure, which unites all of the above. The party structure of “United Russia” is based on three basic principles, these are: the principle of the universal model, the principle of descending reduction of the universal model and the “matryoshka” principle.

The universal model of the party structure of “United Russia” is formed as a universal response of the country's political system to the challenges that exist for the central government in the regions and municipalities. Therefore, United Russia has a clearly defined model, which is the same for branches at all levels of the party organization. This model is general, both in a vertical section for the party structure, and in a horizontal one. In the horizontal dimension, the universality of the model is expressed in the uniform structure of regional and local branches throughout the country. Despite the specifics of the subjects of the Federation, the tasks of regional political systems from the point of view of the country's political system are the same. This commonality of tasks determines the universality of the model, which allows the United Russia party to perform the required political functions in it, regardless of the specifics of the region.

The universality of the model in the vertical dimension is expressed in the constant reproduction of the levels of the internal party structure at each of the three levels of public power, which correspond to the levels of the party organization. From this point of view, there are three levels of party organization that correspond to the three levels of the public power

system: federal, regional and local. In the universal model, it is necessary to distinguish three levels of internal party structure, all of which are present in regional and local branches, as well as at the federal level of the party organization. These are the political, formal-public and hardware levels of the internal party structure of United Russia. These levels are similar to the “three faces of the party” identified by Western researchers: the party as an apparatus, the party as an organization and the party as the electorate” [8, p. 151]. From this point of view, the political level can be correlated with the “face of the party as an organization,” the formal public level can be correlated with the “face of the party as the electorate,” and the apparatus level of the internal party structure corresponds to the “face of the party as an apparatus.” The difference between the universal model and the concept of “faces of the party” is that the first is strictly hierarchical, while the second does not focus on the subordination of levels to each other.

The levels of internal party structure in a broad sense are not structural elements of the party. This is an analytical unification of structural elements. Levels can be called a class of party elements, grouped into such based on essential characteristics. In this case, elements are allocated based solely on the functions they perform: each element of the batch performs its own unique function. But solely the similarity of the functions performed is not the basis for combining elements into one level. This means that similar functions can be performed by elements at different levels of the internal party structure.

The highest in the hierarchy of the internal party structure of United Russia is the political level. It is represented by party bodies and political decision-making positions. The political level is similar to the term “dominant coalition,” which A. Panebianco uses “to designate a group of leaders who control the main power resources of the party organization” [11, p. 38]. The main essential characteristic of the elements of the party structure, classified as the highest level of the internal party structure, is the direct management of the party and the distribution of power. This is, first of all, the distribution of elected positions in the system of public power in Russia between party candidates through the selection and nomination of candidates for appropriate positions, the development of party strategy and the determination of development vectors, as well as the formation of the formal public and apparatus levels of the internal party structure.

Parties around the world in all historical times have been characterized by the situation of consolidation of real power in the party in a narrow circle of party leaders. This was also pointed out by M. Duverger in his classic work on parties: “their internal structure, by its very essence, is autocratic and oligarchic; despite outward appearances, their leaders are not actually nominated by party members, but are co-opted or appointed by the center; they tend to form a leading class isolated from the activists, a kind of caste, more or less closed in on itself” [2, p.508]. The theory of R. Michels about the “iron law of oligarchy”, according to which in political parties, as forms of social organization, sooner or later, despite the democratic basis, a narrow circle of decision makers is formed [5].

Today, thanks to the theory of rational choice and neo-institutionalism, we can offer an alternative point of view to the “iron law of oligarchy”. The basis of the theory of rational choice is the idea of the immutable desire of agents to maximize profits and minimize costs, which, according to J. Buchanan, is the basis of “the natural predisposition of players to conflicts of interest” [13]. An increase in the number of players naturally increases the conflict level of the group, to overcome which this very group, in our case the party, needs to increase transaction costs, which contradicts the immutable law of the theory of rational choice, because the increase in costs is not followed by maximization of profit in the form of an increase in the representativeness of the decision made. This position logically follows from Condorcet's paradox. Therefore, the crystallization of the political level of the internal party structure from the formal public one should be considered as a manifestation of the natural desire of the party, as a political agent, to optimize its own functioning, that is, to reduce transaction costs when making political decisions by limiting the number of persons influencing decision-making.

The next level of the internal party structure in the hierarchy of the universal model of the party structure of “United Russia” is formally public. This level includes formal party

institutions, reflected in official party documents and, above all, in the party charter. In turn, the charter of the United Russia party is based on the regulatory framework of federal legislation. Such formal party institutions include internal party positions and bodies. If the political level is necessary to manage the party, then the main purpose of the formal public level is compliance with regulatory procedures and interaction with society. The main essential characteristics of the political level are formalization, that is, enshrinement in regulatory documents and publicity, that is, interaction with society.

Structures at this level perform the following functions: legitimization and legalization of the party as a political subject, consolidation of the party elite, image formation through the inclusion of opinion leaders in the governing bodies of the party. In addition, the inclusion of public opinion leaders in bodies at the formal public level, who are often leaders of industry or local communities or heads of large enterprises, allows United Russia to carry out electoral mobilization and increase the efficiency of the process of aggregating the interests of various groups. Thanks to this, an organizational relationship is built that “expands the “reach” of the party elites to the space that is located beyond the borders of their own organization. Moreover, such interaction facilitates two-way communication between party elites and groups of voters, established through organizational channels and based on the exchange of electoral mobilization for political responsiveness” [12, p.8].

The final level of the internal party device of the universal model is the hardware level. This level is represented exclusively by formal and non-public divisions. This means that the apparatus of the United Russia party is party bodies and positions enshrined in formal documents, but performing functions not related to interaction with society. At the same time, the party apparatus indirectly interacts with society by ensuring interaction between the formal public level and society. The device ensures the life of the party.

The described universal model of party structure tends to be reduced in the vertical section of the party organization. The model of each subsequent level, starting from the federal level in relation to the higher level of the party organization, is simplified due to the narrowing of the range of additional tasks, but retains the tools for performing basic functions. At the same time, the universal model at the regional and local levels of the party organization preserves all levels of the internal party structure. This means that regional and local branches, just like the federal level of the party organization, have three levels of internal party structure: political, formal-public and apparatus. This principle will be called the downward reduction of the universal model of party structure.

At the regional level of the party organization, the nominally governing bodies of the regional branch are collegial structures of the formal public level, namely the regional political council (RPC) and its presidium (PRPC), but they cannot be fully attributed to the political level, because despite The charter makes it their responsibility to make decisions; this is not part of their functions. At the regional level, the PRPC is partially involved in decision-making - its individual members in both the Stavropol Territory and the Rostov Region can be attributed to the political level. Regarding the role of secretaries in the management of regional branches, it can be said that the secretaries of regional branches in the Stavropol Territory and the Rostov Region are the main operators in resolving internal party issues in the region and the final authority for coordinating decisions made, primarily regarding the distribution of power within the regional branch. Thus, the political level of the internal party structure in the Stavropol Territory and Rostov Region is represented by the secretaries of regional branches and individual members of the PRPC, including the heads of regional executive committees.

The formal public level of the internal party structure of the regional level of the party organization is represented by the conference, the secretary of the regional branch, as well as the RPC and PRPC. The conference and the PRPC, in accordance with the party charter, are the governing bodies of the regional branch [18, clause 13.5]. The conference is the highest governing body of the regional branch; it meets at least once a year, delegates to it are elected by conferences of local branches. First, the conference elects a secretary, a regional political council

and from its members its presidium, as well as a regional control commission and delegates to the congress. Secondly, the conference, in agreement with the Presidium of the General Council, nominates candidates for the elections of deputies of regional parliaments, as well as a candidate for the post of head of the subject. It is important to note that the charter enshrines a safety mechanism against sabotage of local branches: the regional conference can nominate candidates for elections to the representative bodies of municipalities, if the local branch or local conference has not done so [18, paragraphs 13.7.7.6 – 13.7.7.7.6]. The main function of the conference is the legitimization in the public space of adopted internal party decisions through coverage in the information space and their legalization through correlation with legal reality.

The highest official of the regional branch of the party is the secretary of the regional branch. He is elected by the conference simultaneously with the RPC and is accountable to the conference. The position of secretary of the regional party branch has three major areas of authority - political management of the party branch, control-sanctioning powers and ceremonial functions. The secretary has deputies, they are approved by the PRPC at the proposal of the secretary, who independently determines their areas of responsibility [18, clause 13.8.10.]. The secretary carries out political management of the regional branch through the management of the activities of the PRPC, including the distribution of responsibilities among its members [18, clause 13.8.8.2]. PRPC, in turn, carries out comprehensive political, ideological and organizational management of the regional branch. The control and authorization powers of the secretary lie in the fact that he has the right of final signature in relation to decisions of the regional branch: the secretary issues powers of attorney and signs documents of the regional branch, endorses lists of candidates for elections at the regional and local levels, if at the latter the subject of nomination is the regional branch [18, clause 13.8.8.7]. The secretary also ensures that the decisions of the party's governing bodies, represented by the congress, the General Council and its presidium, are communicated to party members and the governing bodies of the regional branch. The secretary is directly responsible for implementing the decisions of the governing bodies of the party and the regional branch. The ceremonial functions of the secretary are associated with presiding over meetings of the governing bodies of regional branches - conferences, RPC and PRPC.

At the regional level of the party organization, the peculiar “dual power” of collective party bodies, inherent in the federal level and represented by the parallel functioning of the Supreme and General Councils, is replaced by the “Matryoshka principle”. Because of this, at the regional level the number of branches of the party organization is reduced to two: leading and controlling. In regional branches there is one collective body - the RPC, from among which the conference of the regional branch selects members of its presidium. The RPC is elected for five years, the charter does not strictly regulate its quantitative composition, but establishes a strict requirement for the party membership of its members, the mandatory inclusion of at least 30 percent of the members of the RPC from among the secretaries of primary branches and an annual ten percent rotation, which allows in this regard to draw its analogy with General Council [18, clause 13.8.1.]. In terms of the functions performed, the RPC and its presidium can be compared with the Supreme Council and the General Council, respectively. Like the Supreme Council, regional political councils include leaders of public opinion. These are leaders of public opinion not only at the regional level, but also at the federal level, provided they have a close connection with the region. The RPC, like the Supreme Council, act as a party platform for gathering famous, respected and resourceful citizens under the banner of the party. Their inclusion in the governing body of the regional branches of the party strengthens the authority of the party in the region.

Currently, the regional political council of the Stavropol regional branch of United Russia consists of 79 members. The current composition of the RPC was elected at the XXXVI Conference of the Stavropol regional branch of the United Russia party on February 28, 2022. These are members of the government, deputies of the Duma of the Stavropol Territory and representative bodies of municipalities, heads of municipal districts, executive secretaries of

local party branches, scientists, sports, education and enlightenment workers, managers of social infrastructure facilities, owners and representatives of medium and large regional businesses [17]. The regional political council of the Rostov regional branch was updated on January 20, 2022. The new composition included 82 party members. These are entrepreneurs, heads of municipalities, deputies at the federal, regional and local levels, heads of social facilities, officials, heads of large enterprises, sports figures, higher education workers, and social activists [16].

The “Matryoshka principle” of the functioning of the RPC is that its presidium, formed from the members of the RPC, not only generates the official political reality, but also, in accordance with the charter, manages the political and organizational activities of the regional branch, which allows us to compare its functions with those performed by the presidium of the General Council at the federal level of the party organization [18, paragraph 13.9.]. The Presidium of the Regional Political Council (PRPC) is a permanent governing elective collegial body of the regional branch. He is elected by the conference of the regional branch from the RPC. Once a year, the composition of the PRPC is subject to ten percent rotation [18, clause 13.9.4.]. PRPC manages the political, ideological and organizational activities of the regional branch of the party, carrying out the functions of three main directions. Firstly, management of the hardware level structures of the regional and local levels of the party organization. The PRPC coordinates with the Presidium of the General Council the appointment and removal of the head of the regional executive committee (REC), and also independently appoints and removes executive secretaries of local branches [18, clause 13.9.10.4.]. The PRPC draws up a financial plan and budget for the regional department, the staffing table of the REC and sends it to the Presidium of the General Council for approval and independently determines the funding of local branches [18, clause 3.9.11.1.].

Secondly, the PRPC exercises political control over the structures of the formal public local level of the party organization. The PRPC coordinates local political councils, and can also deprive the secretaries of local and primary branches and members of local and primary political councils of their powers [18, paragraph 13.9.10.13.]. The PRPC has the right to cancel decisions of conferences, secretaries, and political councils at the local level of the party organization [18, clause 13.9.10.15.]. To participate in the elections, the local branch of the party must agree on the election program in the PRPC. Thirdly, the PRPC controls the distribution of intra-party power at the regional and local levels of the intra-party organization. PRPC may exclude candidates from the list nominated by the regional office for elections. PRPC agrees with local branches of candidates for nomination in elections to local government bodies [18, clause 13.9.11.10.].

The PRPC of the Stavropol regional branch includes 19 people, and the PRPC of the Rostov regional branch includes 16 people. By position, it includes secretaries of regional departments and heads of regional executive committees. Also among the members of the PRPC are members of the governments of the Stavropol Territory and the Rostov Region, deputies of regional parliaments, heads of the largest municipalities, rectors of leading regional universities and heads of large enterprises in the region [14; 15].

The branch of control bodies at the regional level of the party organization includes the Regional Control Commission (RCC). She is elected by the conference and is accountable to it for a period of 5 years from exclusively party members. The RCC elects a chairman and his deputies from among its members. Members of the RCC cannot be members of other party bodies at the formal public level or hold positions in the party apparatus. The RCC exercises control in the regional, local and primary branches of the Party over the procedural and substantive compliance with the party charter and audits the financial and economic activities of the regional branch. The RCC conducts scheduled inspections of local and primary branches, and also, at the request of the PRPC or the secretary, conducts unscheduled inspections, which makes the RCC an additional tool for the control of the PRPC and the secretary over the structures of

the formal public and hardware levels of the local level of the party organization [18, paragraph 13.11].

The hardware level of the internal party device is represented by two branches: organizational and communicative. At the regional level, the organizational branch of the party organization at the hardware level is represented by the regional executive committee of the party (REC). The REC is directly subordinate to the PRPC and the CEC. The PRPC carries out political management of the REC, and the CEC carries out organizational management. The PRPC appoints and removes, as agreed by the Presidium of the General Council, the head of the REC, draws up the staffing table of the REC and manages the financing of the hardware level of the internal party structure of the regional level of the party organization. The REC ensures the functioning of bodies at the formal public level and their interaction with society. This means that the REC prepares regional conferences, meetings of the PRPC and RPC, speeches and reports of the secretary, draft decisions of these bodies and checks their procedural and substantive compliance with the party charter. The CEC carries out project and organizational management of the REC in the following areas: political technology support for the participation of regional and local party branches in election campaigns, party building at the regional and local levels of the party organization, as well as maintaining and strengthening the authority and recognition of the party in the region.

The REC prepares draft election programs and electoral strategies, implements the technological map prepared by the CEC to achieve election results and carries out campaign and mobilization activities in accordance with the strategy and schedule of the party's election campaign. The REC also searches for and prepares candidates. The REC at the regional level of the party organization is the only operator of party building. The REC organizes and maintains party records in the region and municipalities; for this, the party's hardware level structures use a single register of party members, represented by an electronic database. The REC organizes office work in regional, local and primary branches. As part of the regular performance of functions to maintain and strengthen the authority and popularity of the party in the region, the REC builds and maintains a system of unified media planning, prepares and implements media plans. The REC also works on social networks and instant messengers.

To implement each of the functional blocks, the REC device provides an appropriate hardware structure. We are talking about the internal structure of the REC, which consists of departments and positions and is standard for all regional branches. The current activities of the REC are managed by the head, who has deputies from among the heads of departments. Traditionally, the REC has three departments: the propaganda department, the party building department and the organizational department. Also, the structure of the REC implies, outside of any department, the full-time positions of a lawyer, press secretary, accountant, SMM specialist, personnel officer, system administrator and specialist in supporting the activities of the RCC. Thus, the staffing level of the REC is about 30 people, but may change due to the expansion or reduction of the number of department employees.

Conclusion. At the regional level, the communication branch of the party organization at the hardware level is represented by regional public reception offices, which coordinate the work of local public reception offices. In local public reception offices, by analogy with the organizational vertical of the local party organization hardware level, there is one full-time employee, and the practice of combining this work with the position of executive secretary is excluded. Public receptions function independently from the vertical of executive committees. Local public reception centers exist in municipalities along with local branches. The vertical of public receptions has its own network of accounts on social networks. At the same time, the position of the head of the regional public reception cannot be attributed to the formal public level due to the fact that it does not meet one of the criteria – formal, because it is not enshrined in the charter.

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