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Political Humor in *KVN* (1986–1999)

Irina Arkhangelskaya^{a, b, *}

^a Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation

^b Lobachevski State University of Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation

Abstract

The article traces evolution of political humor in popular Russian television game *KVN* in 1986–1999. The online survey, which involved 100 *KVN* fans aged 41–65, helped to figure out what political sketches or gags are the most memorable and might reflect the problems of the period. The author analyzes the show's content taking into consideration the main political and economic events which took place in the USSR during Perestroika and later in the Russian Federation in the 1990s. Having studied *KVN*'s archive video materials (1986–1999), a documentary series *History of Russian humor* (2012), academic works of Russian and Western scholars, and mass media publications on the game, the author noticed the change in humor modus during those years. Tough criticism of the Soviet system combined with hopes for positive changes in the late 1980s. The teams joked on domestic issues, corrupt politicians, disintegration, territorial losses, and admired the Western lifestyle in the 1990s. The game seemed to be above politics, but indirectly supported Boris Yeltsin during 1996 presidential campaign. *KVN* players were “homo sovieticus”: they had common memories, background, and experience. The game worked as “soft power” uniting teams from the former USSR republics in one cultural territory.

Keywords: *KVN*, humor, television game, humor program, the First channel, Russian comedy show.

1. Introduction

Studying humor helps in understanding the national politics, economics, and culture. To decode Russian laugh content, one should get basic knowledge of the country's history, current internal situation as well as people's attitudes and aspirations. Russian laugh culture reflects the country's mentality with its preference of collective over individualistic, belief that spiritual should be above material, respect of strong leadership, and cautious attitude to novelties. For many years national jokes have exploited the idea that Russia is behind its European neighbors in technologies, economics, and living standards, but far ahead in morale. Globalism penetrated the country in late 1980s and affected all spheres of life.

There were not many comedy TV shows in the USSR. But the existing ones gained popularity in a short time and formed the national cultural code. The humorists criticized malfunctioning of the socialist system, but upon the whole were politically correct. *KVN*, *Klub Veselyh i nahodchivyykh* (*The Club of Cheerful and Smart or The Club of Merry and Witty*) differed in format from the existing in the USSR television comedy programs: humor miniatures of Arkady Raikin (1960s–1970s), show “*Kabachok trinadzat' stul'jev*” (*13 Chair Cabaret*, 1960s–1970s). Its key audience were young men, and performers (players) were not professional actors but students.

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: arib@bk.ru (I.B. Arkhangelskaya)

KVN debuted on the USSR First state TV channel on November 8, 1961, as a humor contest of university teams which competed in prepared home sketches and improvised jokes.

Initiated by enthusiasts, *KVN* appeared at the Khrushchev's Thaw, the period when there were more freedom and opportunities of self-expression for the Soviet youth than in the earlier decades, the show gained popularity in the 1960s, was closed for political reasons in 1972 (Evans 2016: 201; Janco, 2013), relaunched in 1986, and since then has been broadcasted on the First state channel of the USSR, then the Russian Federation. It turned out to be a long-lasting program which survived the USSR, Perestroika, the turbulent 1990s, the upsurges and crises in the 2000s, Covid-19, and is on in 2023.

The game has united the Russian speaking youth from the Soviet, later ex-Soviet republics in a battle of humor and wit. Students with the Soviet or Russian background, who immigrated to the USA, the UK, Germany, or Israel, continue playing *KVN* in new locations. *KVN* has always reacted to external and internal political, economic, social issues and played an important role in changing the Soviet mentality during Perestroika and the 1990s.

The goal of the paper is to analyze how the game's participants in sketches, gags, and song contests reacted to political, economic as well as cultural transformations that were going on in the period from 1986 to 1999, in what way the processes of disintegration, forming national identity of Newly Independent States manifested themselves in the show, and how long the Soviet mentality united *KVN* teams.

2. Materials and methods

The research, based on analysis of *KVN* archives from its official web site and online video platforms as well publications of Russian and Western scholars, and a documentary series *History of Russian humor* (2012), traces the evolution of political humor in the game diachronically from 1986 to 1999. The study, conducted on materials of the highest league games as well as academic and media publications, identifies the main political themes and actors presented in *KVN* and explores how they were estimated taking into consideration the political and economic situation in the country. The author analyzes how laugh culture was transforming during those years and what problems united national teams.

100 respondents from Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod, aged 41-65 (87 – female, 13 – male), who confessed that they loved and watched *KVN* games of 1986–1999 seasons, took part in online-survey. They shared their views on the game, helped to pick political sketches and gags that in their opinion reflected the epoch, named the best teams and *KVN* performers of the period.

3. Discussion

The media sphere is a place “for citizens’ contact with the political process” (Gureeva, Kireeva, 2022). Numerous television programs, being part of “politainment” (Grosheva, 2022), reach numerous age groups with “social, cultural, and political perspectives and beliefs, which are often very different or even conflicting” (Fedorov, Levitskaya 2020: 238). Humor programs might cheerfully inform their viewers about domestic and international events, influence electorate participation, create positive or negative image of political actors (Arkhangelskaya, 2021; Baumgartner, Lockerbie, 2018; Baumgartner et al., 2019; Baumgartner, 2021; Cao, 2008; Gulevich, Kalashnik, 2023; Ödmark, Harvard, 2021). Joking on current affairs in entertainment programs, comedians share their normative views on society and politics with audiences (Lichtenstein et al., 2021).

Since the program's relaunch in 1986, political issues have frequently been in *KVN*'s agenda, evoking interest in internal or external events, creating positive or negative attitude to discussed problems or politicians. *KVN*'s political humor for the period 1986–1999 was overlooked by the scholars who considered the game mainly as a tool for socialization of the youth and promotion of students' amateur extra-class activities (Barashkov, 2018; Kovalyov, 2004; Manukyan 2022; Ostromoukhova, 2011; Rubekina, 2015) or phenomenon of mass culture (Buklans, 2010), ignoring the game's role in gluing the Newly Independent States into a positive world of good memories, laugh, joy, and play.

Nevertheless, in the late 1980s–1990s *KVN* proved that “Soviet years did not disappear in the post-Soviet period” (Yurchak, 2006: 296); those who lived in the USSR recalled their past which, together with acute issues, became themes for program's jokes. And for many years *KVN* as an institution reproduced “Soviet-marked values” (Garey, 2020: 7), and was known for its topicality

(Reznikov, Movchan, 2016: 97). Its political jokes spread virally in the society (Istoria Rossiiskogo yumora. Sezon 1, seriya 1, 2012).

The interest to *KVN*'s political humor among Western and Russian scholars has gone up since 2014 when the relations between Russia and the West became tense, and the game got under scrutiny as an instrument that could promote political visions and form public opinion (Ozoliņa et al, 2017). Scholars have studied the game's video materials of 2003–2018 seasons and concluded that teams denigrated unfriendly countries as well as their politicians while Russia and its leaders were presented in a positive light, criticism of domestic issues was soft, and all local problems looked solvable (Barashkov 2018; Pimenova et al, 2018). Russian researchers who are now affiliated with the Western universities have labelled *KVN* as a “controlled game” (Garey, 2020: 2; Tagangaeva 2018: 16) and its content as “state-approved political satire” (Semenenko 2018, 2021). But they practically ignored 1986–1999 *KVN* period. A. Garey ties up *KVN*'s rebirth with Perestroika: deconstruction of the old system required new ideas and energy of the youth, and students' contest took up the challenge (Garey, 2020: 54-60). The players and scriptwriters of the game M. Marfin and A. Chivourin, having analyzed jokes, including political ones, of 1986–1999 seasons, revealed technologies of *KVN*'s humor, but did not analyze them in historical, political, and economic context (Marfin, Chivourin, 2008). That period of *KVN*'s activity, including its political discourse, remains unstudied. The article aims to fill in the gap and explore the development of political humor in the game from 1986 to 1999.

4. Results

At the very start *KVN* was broadcasted live and consisted of improvisations, but since 1971, to avoid “dangerous” jokes and control the program's timing, the game has been recorded, and after montage shown on prime time. In the 1960s jokes in *KVN* were mostly about students' life, scientific issues, and bureaucracy. Teams were from technical, civil engineering, or medical institutes, and showing knowledge of physics, math's, or strength of materials was a normal practice at games (Akselrod et al, 1974). In 1960s–1970s characters with beards did not appear in the game as they might resemble Karl Marx whose legacy became the ideological cornerstone of the Soviet system. There were no political jokes or satire in the program: the television content was under control in the USSR.

The late 1980s, Gorbachev's Perestroika, was, on the one hand, a period of economic disaster and, on the other hand, the time of hope (Strovsky, Schleifer, 2021): the youth was expecting serious changes in all spheres. Those days there were many political jokes in *KVN*: students were ironic about the Communist party. In 1988 in semifinal between the teams from Novosibirsk State University and Dnepropetrovsk State University, the Siberians' joked: “Party, let us drive!”. The gag was based on the well-known in the USSR slogan “The party is our driving force”. “The communist” recalled that he had lived in the period when all people at party meetings applauded stoya (standing) and voted unanimously ZA (yes), for that reason the period of Brezhnev rule was named “zastoy” (stagnation). Such jokes signaled that it was allowed to laugh at the Communist party (*KVN, 1988*).

Some *KVN* sketches in 1987–1989 were about rationing of food and consumer goods, partnerships (a new form of proprietorship), differences in payment for qualified and non-qualified labor: when industrial entities closed many engineers were made redundant, and a cleaner's salary was higher than that of an engineer. In the 1980s–1990s there was a strong belief among Russian people that the West was superior in such spheres as economics, industrial development, finance, and standard of living. *KVN* players emphasized that the USSR would never be able to compete with the West. The sketches of “Odessa gentlemen”, a team from Odessa State University, illustrate that:

1st dialogue:

– *What does the Russian industry require to be up to the world standards?
To change the standards”.*

2d dialogue:

– *Why aren't you dancing, gentleman?*

– *It's my first ball. I am afraid to do something wrong.*

– *Don't be afraid. Everything, that could have gone wrong, have already happened”* (*KVN, 1987*).

Politicians were not popular with *KVN* players:

– *Those idiots*

- *‘Shhh...Not a word about politics!’* (KVN, 1990b).

After 1991 coup in Moscow, when Mikhail Gorbachev was no longer in power, the parody on the former CPSU General Secretary and the USSR president appeared in local St. Petersburg KVN game. The impersonator pronounced verbose speech full of expressions typical for Gorbachev: “Perestroika”, “the process is irreversible”, “uglUbit’ (make it deeper)”. The comedian imitated the Southern accent of the Secretary General, his habit to make wrong stresses in words and mispronounce them. Whatever a question the audience asked, “Gorbachev” gave a long and irrelevant answer to it (Nezavisimyi KVN, 1991). The first USSR president was out of power then and became an easy target for satire. Comedians showed him as a decent, but weak leader who led the country to collapse.

In the 1990s, during Boris Yeltsin’s presidency, KVN found much material for satire, criticizing liberal reforms, inequality, unfair privatization, dishonest businesses that robbed people. In 1994, students from Odessa State University sang about problems of new Russia where “common people are miserable in the country that is ruled by MMM” (KVN, 1994a). MMM was a financial pyramid that left many people without their savings (Sinelnikova, 2020). Students blamed the RF government in improper management that let swindlers rob naive investors.

In 1993 Azerbaijan team “Guys from Baku” reminded Russia about the existing and possible territorial losses:

- *“Russia must sell the Kuril Islands*
- *What for?*
- *To buy the Black Sea fleet?*
- *What for?*
- *To sell and buy the Kuril Islands”* (KVN 1993a).

Regional conflicts started before the collapse of the USSR, one of them was between Azerbaijan and Armenia over a disputed territory of Nagorni Karabakh. In 1992 “Guys from Baku” and a team from Erevan medical institute got into the final and had to meet face to face. At that period the war between two republics was at full swing, and KVN organizers decided to smooth the situation and announced both teams joint-winners: the concert substituted the competition (KVN, 1992a).

Those days the Western politicians were softly parodied. Team “New Armenians” in 1996 impersonated Bill Clinton (Garik Martyrosyan) showing the US president as an amiable guy reading rap (KVN, 1996b). President Boris Yeltsin, in the audience, sat laughing and enjoying the show: his visit was a part of the president’s public relations campaign. In 1997 Garik Martyrosyan made a parody on Bill Clinton one more time: the comedian was playing saxophone and singing in English and Armenian while the team was performing Armenian folk dances (Novye Armyane, 1997).

KVN was popular television program in the period of 1986–1990, people were afraid to miss the show (Istoria..., 2012a).

Table 1. Respondents' answers to the question: “What KVN teams who played in 1986–1999 do you consider to be the best?” (an open question, more than one answer was possible)

What team/s is the best, in your opinion?	%
Dnepropetrovsk State University	56
Novosibirsk State University	52
“Odessa gentlemen”, Odessa State University)	48
Drim Tim	28
St. Peterburg State University	23
MAGMA	6
Lieutenant Shmidt’s kids, Tomsk	5
All teams were good those days	18
It is difficult to say	12

One hundred respondents, aged 41-65, from Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow, who watched the game on a regular basis in the 1990s agreed to share their opinion on the teams and comedians, recall the most memorable political sketches or gags in each season from 1986 to 1999. The list of teams who played in 1986–1999 seasons was attached to the questionnaire.

The top choice is team from Dnepropetrovsk State University (Ukraine) which gained popularity because of its musical sketches on political themes during Perestroika.

All other teams consisted of talented performers who were good at singing, acting, and scriptwriting. Many of them made careers in show business and media industry after *KVN*.

Table 2. Respondents' answers to the question: “Who is your favorite *KVN* player who took part in 1986–1999 games?” (an open question, more than one answer was possible)

“Who is your favorite <i>KVN</i> player of 1986–1999 seasons?”	%
Alexander Pushnoi, Novosibirsk State University	54
Dnepropetrovsk State University (all members of the team)	52
Dmitry Khrustalev, St. Petersburg State University	47
Jan Levinson, “Odessa gentlemen”, Odessa State University	41
Dmitry Sivokho (Drim Tim)	36
Garik Martirosyan, (“New Armenians”)	34
Andrey Chivourin, Kharkiv Aviation Institute	24
Valery Zakutsky, “Squadron of hussars”	16
Tatyana Lazareva, Novosibirsk State University	16
Viktor Vasiliev, St. Petersburg State University	15
No preferences	14
The was one whose name I cannot recall	2

The respondents remembered Alexander Pushnoi for his remarkable musical parodies but considered that Dnepropetrovsk State University team was better at political sketches though were also good at musical performances. Dmitry Khrustalev, Alexander Vasiliev, and Garik Martirosyan are popular showmen nowadays. Survey participants could recall their sketches and impersonations of the 1990s, Vasiliev made a parody on Boris Yeltsin. Jan Levinson was named a talented comic actor of Perestroika, Andrey Chivourin – recognized as one of *KVN*'s founders, Tatyana Lazareva (Novosibirsk State University) and Dmitry Sivokho (Drim Tim) are remembered as singing and dancing comedians.

Being asked to highlight the political sketches and jokes that reflected political situation of each year, the respondents made a list of those they found outstanding. Participants of the survey had time to think over their answer, watch *KVN* archives to recall the games. Those episodes that got most votes are in the table below.

Table 3. *KVN*'s political sketches and gags (1986–1999) that reflected the situation in Russia (those that were often mentioned by the respondents)

Season	Game / teams	Team	Political sketch, joke, or song	Message
1986–1987 Apr.	Second semifinal. Voronezh Institute of Civil Engineering and “Odessa Gentlemen”, Odessa State University	“Odessa Gentlemen”, Odessa State University	Sketch “Elections of Ivan Ivanovich” (<i>Vybory...</i> , 1987)	Elections are not fair; candidates are unknown to the electorate. (“The name Ivan Ivanovich” generalizes the problem).
1988 June	1 st semifinal. Novosibirsk State University and Dnepropetrovsk State University	Novosibirsk State University	“Party, let us drive!” (<i>KVN</i> , 1988)	We are no longer afraid of the Communist Party

1989 Dec	Final game. Donetsk Polytechnic Institute, Kharkov Higher Military Command Engineering College and “The Ural Janitors”, Sverdlovsk Polytechnic Institute	“The Ural Janitors”, Sverdlovsk Polytechnic Institute	Konkurs “Competition Salesmanship” (KVN, 1989)	No food, no products in stores, but we’ve got <i>glasnost</i> and can say what we want, but that does not make us happy.
1990 Apr.	2d quarter final. Kiev polytechnic Institute and Dnepropetrovsk State University	Dnepropetrovsk State University	A musical sketch “Belovezhskaya Pushcha” based on a song of A. Pakhmutova and A. Dobronravov (KVN, 1990a)	The 6 th amendment of Constitution that gives the Communist party of the USSR a right to rule should be banned. The country’s political system requires radical reforms.
1991 Sep.	First seminal between “Squadron of hussars”, Lviv military political college and “The Ural Janitors”, Sverdlovsk Polytechnic Institute	“The Ural Janitors”, Sverdlovsk Polytechnic Institute	Parody on the USSR anthem. Song in which bearded revolutionaries (V. Lenin, F. Castro) are compared to clean-shaved members of the State Extraordinary Committee who failed in organizing the coup (putch) in Aug. 1991. (KVN, 1991)	What was sacred in the USSR can be a subject of humor in new Russia.
1992	Festival in Sochi (12 teams). Novosibirsk State University and Dnepropetrovsk State University, Luhansk Pedagogical institute, “Odessa Gentlemen”, Odessa State University, Kharkiv Aviation Institute, Voronezh Civil Engineering Institute, Tashkent State Technical	Dnepropetrovsk State University	“A song about happiness”, (based on a popular song “You know, everything’s gonna happen” (composer M. Minkov) (KVN, 1992)	We’ve got serious problems in politics, economics, social sphere, there are conflicting relations between the RF and Ukrainian elites. We will overcome them. And there will be understanding peace between new and old political elites.

	University, “Guys from Baku”, Erevan Medical Institute, St. Peterburg State University, Donetsk Polytechnic etc.	“Odessa Gentlemen”, Odessa State University	Jokes about borders among former USSR republics. The announcement of Moscow time is interrupted by announcement of Kiev time in Ukrainian, and its last signal “means the end of Moscow time (rule)”. (KVN, 1992)	We were one territory, we had common problems, but now we are separate countries
1993 Oct.	Second semi-final. Leningrad Financial economic Institute and “Dream team”, Donetsk/ Ekaterinburg (formed by Donetsk Polytechnic Institute and “The Ural Janitors”	Leningrad Financial economic Institute	Musical sketch (based on a song “Beri shinel”, composer V. Levashov, lyrics B. Okudzhava) describes a story of newly-weds who come to the Red square to find out that the Mausoleum is rented by financial pyramid MMM, its guards have gone to sell their rifles, the blue elms have been cut for sale, Minin and Pozharsky are leaving the monument pedestal for good. (KVN, 1993b)	We are not aware of what new values are, but the changes are not for the better.
1994	Second 1 st semifinal. MAGMA (Moscow), Kharkiv Aviation Institute	Both teams	Jokes about financial pyramid MMM (KVN, 1994b)	Financial pyramids rob people.
		MAGMA (Moscow)	A song about hopes (based on a popular Soviet song “Nadezhda”, composer A. Pakhmutova, lyrics A. Dobronravov). The team expects to see the country in old borders and with old friends. And one wish came true: Alexander Solzhenitsyn came back to Russia (KVN, 1994b)	Nostalgia for great Russia and hopes for the better life.

1995 Dec.	Final. Kharkiv Aviation Institute and "Squadron of hussars" (changed affiliation for the RF Armed Forces, Moscow.	Kharkiv Aviation Institute	Razminka (Q&A contest) - <i>What does a deputy (member of the RF parliament) mandate mean?</i> - <i>A well-feeding document ("ochen' khlebnaya kartochnka")</i> (KVN, 1995)	No trust to politicians who become deputies of the State Duma.
1996	2d. Semifinal. Belarus State University and Zaporozhe - Krivoi Rog- Transit	Belarus State University	Sketch "Time travel to Vladimir Zhirinovsky's childhood" (KVN, 1996a)	It would have been better if Zhirinovsky had nothing to do with politics
1997 Dec.	Final. "New Armenians" vs Zaporozhe-Krivoi Rog-Transit	"New Armenians"	A sketch in which Armenians who "changed" their nationalities into Ukrainian, Russian, and Jewish discuss conflicting issues between Russia and Ukraine while a Jew records their claims: the Black sea fleet, Ukrainians debts for gas, Sevastopol (KVN, 1997)	Yesterday we were together and had no conflicts, but the situation has changed.
1998 Dec.	Final. "Lieutenant Shmidt's kids", Tomsk and "Four Tatars", Kazan	"Lieutenant Shmidt's kids", Tomsk	- <i>What will happen if communists come to power? Will they build communism?</i> - <i>No, they will put democrats in line</i> - <i>And who will build communism?</i> - <i>The Swedes, Danish, and Finns as usual</i> (KVN, 1998) - <i>And why does not the president understand that is high time to retire... to help the country...?</i> - <i>He understands that it won't help.</i> (KVN, 1998)	Communism has not been built in the USSR. But there are traces of communism in developed Scandinavian countries with their equal opportunities and social care. So sad. It would be better if Boris Yeltsin left the post. But the country is in deep trouble, and his retirement might not help.

1999 Dec.	Final. “New Armenians”, St. Peterburg State University, and Belarus State University	St. Peterburg State University	Parody on Boris Yeltsin (Vladimir Vasiliev) in which the president is shown as a man with dementia. Compliments to Vladimir Putin who attended the game the first time (KVN, 1999)	Yeltsin should go. Who is Mr. Putin?
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During Perestroika *KVN* players joked about problems which were important for people who lived in the USSR: political and economic failures and pitfalls, humiliating state of science, industry, culture on post-Soviet territory, or new forms of proprietorship. They expressed hope that everything would change for the better. Territorial disputes, which started in several republics, were not in the agenda but everyone remembered about them and tried to avoid competition between teams from conflicting republics.

In 1990, the laugh vector turned to sharp criticism of the Soviet system: the dominating role of the communist party proclaimed in the USSR Constitution, the impotence of Soviet economics. The idea of disintegration was in the air. Three Ukrainian teams of Donetsk Polytechnic Institute, Dnepropetrovsk State University, and “Odessa Gentlemen”, Odessa State University were leading in the season and met in the final game to raise the most painful issues.

After the collapse of the USSR *KVN* was adapting to the new rules and policies, trying to be up to standards of newly formed TV entertainment industry. The game became a commercial project with sponsors and advertisers. In 1994 the Club launched a supplementary competition in Sochi, in 1996 – a musical contest in Jurmala (Latvia), and in 1998 – Moscow Mayor Cup game. Musical festival “Singing Kivin”, held in Jurmala, Latvia from 1996 to 2014, started as a summer outreach event and gathered the most popular teams of the season from different countries, mostly from former USSR republics: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kirgizstan, and Belarus. *KVN*’s musical contests in Jurmala (Latvia) worked as Russian “soft power” involving the youth from the former USSR republics into joyous meetups with “carnival sense of the world” ([Bakhtin 1999: 107](#)). In that period the Soviet past, Russian language, and culture united game participants. Popular Soviet and Russian songs, movies, as well as new commercials were often used as a basis for sketches. The teams mentioned contradictions between Russia and Newly Independent States.

KVN players did not challenge the political elites. Russian teams implicitly took part in political campaigns supported Boris Yeltsin in 1996 ([Istoria..., 2012b](#)). But the game, like antenna, received signals from different social strata and reflected their hopes and aspirations in humoristic mode. In 1999 St. Peterburg State University team dared to show the first RF President as a weak politician unable of decision-making on a state level. All eyes turned to prime-minister Vladimir Putin sitting in the theater hall and laughing at *KVN*’s sketches.

In the 1990s *KVN* teams criticized what was going on in Russia and ex-Soviet republics. Jokes about the Western world and its leaders, on the contrary, were complimentary. The game was popular among viewers of different age groups and played an important role in entertaining and informing people of the current events.

5. Conclusion

KVN remains the longest lasting humor program in Russia. It started as a students’ game and transformed into a commercial show. Since late 1980s political humor has become a part of its discourse, but *KVN* players have never seriously criticized the country’s elites. The game evolved along with the country. In the USSR *KVN* united young men from different socialist republics, and after the collapse of the Soviet system – the youth from Newly Independent States into the world of humor and wit.

In the late 1980s the communist party was under scrutiny in *KVN*, and that was a sign of global changes which were going on in the Soviet system. Political uncertainty, economic collapse, and social injustice became topics of *KVN*’s humor. In their musical sketches players of Dnepropetrovsk State University expressed despair, disappointment, and frustration witnessing

transformations during Perestroika in all Soviet republics. They, as well as other teams, promoted the idea that the existing system should be destroyed but did not offer any program for future.

After the collapse of the USSR, KVN, trying to survive in the new circumstances, started attracting advertisers and sponsors. The teams laughed at “new Russians”, financial frauds, and corrupt politicians while the donors were beyond criticism.

In the 1990s KVN seemed not to be politically aligned, but it turned out that the teams supported Boris Yeltsin during 1996 presidential campaign and made the heads of the RF Communist and Liberal Democratic parties the objects of bitter satire. In 1999 the players mocked at the RF president as if knowing that he was going to resign soon.

The teams complimented the US presidents, praised the Western lifestyle, joked at the Russian industry as well as its financial and business institutions.

Teams from New Independent States emphasized that they were no longer under “Moscow rule”. At the same time some teams felt nostalgic about the Soviet past and doubted that disintegration was for the better. In the 1990s KVN participants remained “homo Sovieticus” and the game worked as “soft power” uniting all teams in territory of good laugh and fun.

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