The 1990s in Russia were marked by major political and economic reforms. Those significant transformations inevitably changed relations within society, and the legal regulations that were supposed to control them demanded a considerable change as well.

A grandiose legal reform which affected all branches of law was carried out. The transformations in the civil procedure sphere which began in the early 90s are still going on today. A new package of legislation was introduced; from the Civil Procedure Code of the Russian Federation (the CPC) to enforcement laws.

Current Russian civil procedural law is the result of mixing the Soviet style of adjudication with the prerevolutionary laws of XIX century, as well as with modern international standards. Some features are unique, with their roots being in ancient Russian laws and traditions. Moreover, the specificity of legal culture should also be taken into account.

Historically, Russian civil procedure has been close to the European continental system. Different parts of this system were adopted in different historical periods: Byzantine law (IX–X centuries); Swedish law (XVIII century); French law (XVIII–XIX); and German law (XIX–XX).

The first written legal act is the trade agreement entered into between Prince Oleg and the Byzantine Empire in 911. Byzantium had a significant economic, trade and cultural influence on the Kievan Rus during that time. Slavs adopted many Byzantine legal institutions, especially penal procedure and evidence.
Codified acts play the key role in the subsequent history of Russian civil procedure. Some of them are completely devoted to civil legal proceedings, some contain only a special section on this matter. Those documents are:

- Russkaia Pravda, 11th century;
- The Pskov Judicial Charter (Pskovskaia Sudnaia Gramota), 1397;
- The Novgorod Judicial Charter (Novgorodskaiia Sudnaia Gramota), 1471;
- The Law Code (Sudebnik), 1497;
- The Law Code (Sudebnik), 1550;
- The Sobornoe Ulozhenie, 1649;
- The Civil Procedure Code of the Russian Empire (Ustav Grazhdanskogo sudoproisvodstva), 1864;
- The Civil Procedure Code of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), 1923;
- The Civil Procedure Code of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic), 1964;

Russkaia Pravda contains some rules on civil evidence and litigation. The power to consider the cases belonged only to the Prince. Some rules on evidence were authentic, some were adopted from Byzantine law.

Since the adoption Christianity, canon law (also from Byzantium) started to play a very important role. It regulated marriage, divorce and all family conflicts.

Two key acts entered into force in the XIV–XV centuries: the Pskov Judicial Charter (Pskovskaia Sudnaia Gramota) of 1397 and the Novgorod Judicial Charter (Novgorodskaiia Sudnaia Gramota) of 1471. They were enacted despite the dominion of the Tatar-Mongol Yoke; most legal procedures originated from the Russkaia Pravda and Mongol litigation practices were not adopted.

The Judicial Code (Sudebnik) of 1497 and the Judicial Code (Sudebnik) of 1550 started to regulate the judicial procedure in a more detailed manner than before. The main judicial power belonged, as before, to the Prince. There were also regional governors who had the right to consider some cases but their decisions could be appealed to the Prince. There were also different judicial officials that assisted in the consideration of cases. The main evidence used in civil cases was witness testimony. Judicial duels were also widespread. Proceedings during that time were adversarial.

The Sobornoe Ulozhenie of 1649 is the most important legal act of Medieval Russia. It is an example of the first structural codification of the civil procedural law in Russia. It was influenced not only by previous norms based on Byzantine law, but also by the legislation of the Lithuanian Code of 1588. The proceedings remained to be adversarial.

The next important step was the modernization of the Russian legal system by Peter the Great. Modernization during that period is usually described as
westernization. Sweden served as an example for many changes, including legal changes. Civil procedure was also updated in accordance with Swedish legislation. This ended the adversarial model and introduced an inquisitorial model.

The Great Judicial Reform of 1864 was a major legal event in the prerevolutionary period. It abolished previous legislation and established a new model. Civil procedure became oral and adversarial. Justices of the peace and professional attorneys were introduced. Courts and judges acquired genuine independence. Practices of litigation changed radically.

Soviet civil procedure (1917-1991) was radically inquisitorial. Soviet judges were more active than their European civil law counterparts. Proceedings were overridden in accordance with the principle of ‘objective’ (material) truth. Objective truth is usually used in civil procedure doctrine in contrast to formal truth. Material truth was an important part of Soviet legality. This principle was crucial in evidence gathering. The main task was to find objective truth. A judge was obliged to ascertain the truth and, therefore, had the power to obtain any evidence that he needed to consider the case.

In addition to the judge’s activity, there were some other peculiar features of the Soviet civil procedure. Firstly, procurators had huge powers. The Procurator General could initiate the inspection of any case considered by a court. Secondly, there was an additional appeal stage called ‘supervisory proceedings.’ Supervisory proceedings were similar to cassation but could be initiated by some official authorities as well as the parties.

The new constitution was approved in 1993 and proclaimed some important principles of civil procedure such as the independence of judges, adversarial proceedings and orality. The new Civil Procedural Code was adopted in 2003 after 10 years of official drafting.