

PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASSUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

2021.01.002. ELENA DMITRIEVA. THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ELITES IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS REGION // *Condensed abstract.*

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Elena Dmitrieva,

Senior Research Associate,

Department of Asia and Africa, INION RAN

1. A. Salgiriev, A. Baranov, Yu. Kostenko. The emergence of new flashpoints of ethno-political tension in the North Caucasus as a consequence of the crisis of the elites // *"Evrazijskoe Nauchnoe ob'edinenie."* 2019. No. 7-2 (53). P. 145-147.

2. Yu. Rudkov. Political Elites of the Northern Caucasus: Features of the Modern Development Stage // *"Kaspijskij region: politika, ekonomika, kul'tura."* 2019. No. 1 (58). P. 175-181.

In their study [1], Ali Salgiriev, Andrej Baranov, Yuliya Kostenko consider the role of elites in the North Caucasus, discuss the process of their formation, structuring and behavioral patterns. The North Caucasus, a complex and deprived region of Russia, is mostly inhabited by indigenous peoples professing

Islam and Christianity. Extremely high degree of politicization, ethnicity, clannish signs and tribalization provide fertile ground for conflicts. Regional ethno-political elites comprise a complex system of teips and family ties and are formed on a closed, guild-based model. New members are allowed in this elite circle only with the approval of proxies and through informal connections.

Political elites in the North Caucasus wield real power and have covert leverage in decision-making. The authors point out that the poor quality of the elite results in the eruption of new conflicts or the escalation of old ones. For its own financial interests ethnocracy use the historic memory of peoples, unresolved territorial disputes, injustice, social differentiation, etc. The researchers also name imposing archaic views, poorly developed civil society institutions and economic backwardness among factors behind permanent tension and conflicts in the region.

The Federal Government adopted a policy of decentralization and began to delegate certain powers to the regions during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. This resulted in a series of intrastate and regional conflicts, particularly in the North Caucasus. Today, the lack of capable political elite in the region and inability of some leaders to adequately analyse the situation on the ground lead to the emergence of new hotbeds of ethno-political tension and conflicts. For example, in early October, 2018, in Ingushetia there were demonstrations, rallies and protest marches marked by insults to the regional authorities, with calls for a change of government, etc. The protests were sparked by the agreement signed on September 26, 2018, between the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia on the delimitation of the territory; as a result of this agreement Ingushetia lost a significant part of its lands. Such developments have shown that the situation could be further exacerbated by inconsistent and hasty steps by the ethno-elites along with the spread of false information by political opponents, who use this sensitive issue for their own purposes.

These social protests, therefore, show that political elites are not always able to articulate the interests of citizens; indicate low civilian confidence in the decisions of political and administrative elites; and also denote that the population is strongly influenced by the opposition. It is noted that the counter-elites play an active role in the political process. For example, oppositional Western Diasporas hustled to lead this process for their own promotion.

The neighboring Chechen Republic took a diametrically opposite stance on the border problem. A survey conducted in 2017 shows that the majority of respondents (55%) believe that the situation in the North Caucasus will remain the same, 11% believe that it will worsen, 15% answer that it will improve and only 19% find it difficult to answer the question. These figures show that the population of the North Caucasus is skeptical about the recent changes.

The Russian society strongly believes that the Government injects billions of dollars in the Caucasus region, where these enormous sums of money are stolen. Such attitudes are fostered by biased mass media and gain momentum during the election period. In fact, according to available statistical data, three out of top five subjects of the Russian Federation receiving subsidies are not in the North Caucasian Federal District.

The authors define the structure of the North Caucasian elites as one based on patron-client relationship with a strong predominance of political and administrative factors. Such an elite structure suggests a leader (a head or "patron") and a body of assistants, advisers, deputies, etc. which make up "clientele". Once the patron is transferred to another position, he is joined by his clientele. If the patron is removed from office, his "court" is dissolved and ex-clientele may lose reputation. This elite organization can exist only with a vertical patronage structure, under the wing of a more influential official. Such a closed system structure and authoritarian distribution of political and economic power result in rather strong conflict potential and intense internal contradictions among the elites. Without the

approval of the “patron” and his patronage, ordinary people cannot be appointed to leadership positions.

The authors point out once again that the major source of conflict is the mechanisms of the formation of ethno-political elites and their low quality. In this regard, major shortcomings are still the same: widespread corruption, lack of professionalism and underground activities. In the North Caucasus, corruption is the main source of public frustration, provoking protests, especially among young people.

Further the authors pass to consideration of the present situation in the region. They note the beginning of the centralization process of the “vertical of power” and the expanding role of the federal authorities, including the appointment of plenipotentiary representatives of the President in the federal districts and the establishment of territorial ministries. The authors attribute these administrative changes to the gradual weakening of the central authority in the localities and the growing role of ethnocracy because of weak governance.

In conclusion, the authors note that the political elites in the Caucasian republics are able to influence and determine ethnic mobilization potential, which leads to a certain bargain with local ethno-elites. The solution to the problem, as the authors see it, is to gradually reduce the role of the elites; to introduce new recruiting methods and ways of incorporating the elites; to further integrate the peoples of the North Caucasus into civilizational and cultural space of Russia; and to fight against social differentiation by defeating corruption and introducing fair courts.

Considering the current stage of development of the elites of the North Caucasus, Yuri Rudkov [2] emphasises profound inequality of the RF regions and considerable political and economic disproportions in their potential, determined by national character and historical background of these territories.

Given these historical circumstances, the author believes the local elites have different socio-economic opportunities and

therefore are forced to use various management strategies, which sometimes result in confrontation or even conflict among the elites. As the author sees it, the objective of the federal authorities is to prevent the escalation of these conflicts or even nip them in the bud. The efficiency of this policy can be evaluated by the quality the local political and administrative elites.

In the 1990s Russian political elites developed at a time of democratization process and the dominance of the Western liberal concept of power. Then, in the 2000s and especially in 2010s they faced new internal development challenges in the wake of strengthening State hierarchy, conflict with Western values, levelling of some democratic institutions against the backdrop of increasing bureaucratization, and establishment of a “soft authoritarian” regime. After Vladimir Putin’s Munich speech (February 10, 2007), the Russian leadership took a course for strengthening sovereignty and curtailing the open partnership with Western countries. It was the problem of sovereignty that became the subject of tension between Moscow and Western countries, which by that time had been habitually using Russia’s sovereignty in their own geopolitical interests.

If one looks into the basics of the Russian elite, they have the same features and elements, characteristic of the entire Russian society, such as traditionalism, statism, principle of one-man management, red tape, etc.

The latter is particularly relevant to the issue of corruption and patron-client relationship. The author asserts that the problem is not hushed up, but is actively discussed at all levels, although it cannot be solved once and for all due to sociocultural volatility and imperfection of political system itself.

In 2008, Vladislav Surkov, the author of the concept of sovereign democracy and personal assistant of the President, stated that the lack of open competitive selection is the major shortcoming of the Russian political elite.

The modern Russian administrative and political elite still worship Western authorities, believing that Russia has no moral

right for a dissenting opinion. The vestiges of Westernization are especially strong in those who came to power in the 1990s. The so-called comprador elite (most commonly referred to as the "fifth column") considered themselves as an integral element of the globalist project of the West, since they shared its fundamental values and practically began to integrate into its socio-economic systems.

As experts note, a significant part of the Russian elite have vested interest outside the country. The political elite, which was formed mainly during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, now is virtually stagnant, having artificially halted upward mobility. The Russian elite reproduces itself and increasingly acquires hereditary traits: the heirs receive good education and get "cushy jobs" to start their careers. Government officials are concerned neither with the development nor with raising the prestige of Russian universities. They do not send their children to study at the local universities, but send them abroad instead, where they receive Western education and absorb Western ideology. Some children of Russian highest-level officials have already acquired foreign citizenships. As a result, the next generation of the Russian elite, which is gradually coming to power, is not going to promote national interests of their homeland. Thus, the elite becomes extremely vulnerable to external pressure, which puts the state interests at risk and, in particular, limits Russia's sovereignty.

Moreover, the author identifies another threat in the very federal structure of the Russian state, namely problems associated with asymmetric federalism. A federal structure ideally implies free competition between regional elites and setting up of a regional government on the basis of open and alternative democratic procedures. However, in Russia, it is the central Government that appoints the head of the subject and thus forms the regional elite which is a feature of the unitary nature of the administrative-territorial structure. Thus, one can speak of Russian federalism as mixed and asymmetric, since

national republics, as well as regions and territories, are also subjects of the Russian Federation. This is especially evident in the case of the national republics of the North Caucasus. It has always been a complex region and therefore constantly monitored by the Government.

In the author's opinion, there are more socio-economic problems in the North Caucasus than in other regions of Russia, which is exactly why it receives such close attention. But at the same time, the local elite communities should be given a great deal more attention since the security of the South of Russia depends on the consensus with them.

Speaking about the peculiarities of the political and administrative elites of the republics of the North Caucasus, the author notes their striving for ethnocracy based on the traditional (conservative) way of political thinking. Ethnocracy is a type of political system in which political power is distributed on the basis of entirely ethnic goal-setting and therefore is mainly facilitated by ethnic traditions.

After the end of the Second Chechen Campaign, the region is going through a period of relative socio-economic and political tranquility and stabilization. However, it does not mean that all the problems in the region have vanished. The problems may be not pressing at the time, and although they are off agenda now, they still exist. In the multi-ethnic regions of the North Caucasus, as is well known, ethno-political stratification is the driving factor of the political and administrative elite, determining its relations and ties with the Federal Government. The challenges of ethnocracy are still to be addressed through the integration of the local elites into the cultural and political structures of Russia. The author refers to the expert opinion that at the present stage the local political elites of the North Caucasus have yet to realign their activities in conditions of strong central authority and closer control over financial subsidies to the regions.

In the 2000–2010s the North Caucasus developed a regional one-party political system. In the republics of the North

Caucasus, United Russia consistently received over 90% of the votes. United Russia's sky-high result in the North Caucasus may be explained by lack of other political parties in the region.

The author cites Arushan Vartumyan, the Doctor of Political science, who argues that "the political elites at the regional level are not a homogeneous group in terms of social status and functions. <...> The "teams" of officials at the service of the heads of the regions provide legal formalization and legitimization of political decisions. These "teams" with power act as intermediaries between the federal elites and business groups in the regions, increasingly becoming dependent partners of corporate structures. Large business groups provide the economic resources for the entire elite community, support its stability, and often determine the regional Government's composition (presidents or governors). Political parties, social movements, and the media serve the interests of the elite's administrative and economic groups. Organized crime, which is the most "mobile powerful institution" of elite politics, determines zones of political influence and influences the distribution of power."

The prerequisite to the successful development of the regions is the high-quality education of the professional elite, who are well aware of their political status and multidimensional nature and complexity of the tasks to be solved. However, most of the political and administrative elites prefer to receive higher education at federal universities or abroad. The local university communities are not yet qualified and experienced enough to offer quality professional education. Therefore, in the author's view, in order to solve the personnel problem of regional elites, the authorities should address the development of the regional system of professional education in the first place. It should be remembered that the North Caucasus region requires constant rather than partial attention from the central authorities.

Analysing the peculiarities of ethno-political conflicts, the author singles out clan disputes and corruption activities of local

officials, which seriously undermine the authority of the supreme power in the region. Back during the Soviet era, the North Caucasus was not characterized by exceptionally tranquil atmosphere. In the chaotic 1990s, corruption, crime and terrorism originated here and subsequently spread all over Russia. In the 2000s, the spread was finally reversed, but it's impossible for the Government to eliminate these phenomena due to a number of political and economic reasons. Regional elites find themselves unable to tackle acute socio-economic problems, particularly unemployment (especially among young people), corruption (especially that of officialdom) and crime (especially in the underground economy). Some corrupt high-ranking officials' activities significantly undermine Russia's authority in the region. In addition, local authorities sometimes discredit themselves with ill-considered actions. Experts point out that local problems, particularly in the judiciary, are due not to family ties and relations, but to the fight of clans' patrons for the control of power and resources. The problem of non-observance of legal rights of citizens may be not only in sometimes too traditional court proceedings, but also in behind-the-scenes control over "independent courts" which substitute for appropriate judicial control.

The author notes steadily increasing role of the North Caucasus's counter-elites, which lead intra-ethnic clans, territorial economic groups and numerous religious communities. According to experts, the ethno-political elites of the North Caucasus region represent an ethnically homogeneous social community, which has the key role in decision-making process and necessary resource potential to lobby the interests of the ethnic group. The formation of the region's ethno-political elites stems from the historical and cultural context, that determines traditionalization, ethnicization and development of the shadow economy. The ethno-political elites of the North Caucasus retain the authoritarian ways and values of political governance. The basic recruitment channels for elites, which define the specifics of elitogenesis,

remain traditional: clan affiliation, ethnic origin, protectionism, clientelism and paternalism.

Russian political scientists have come to the conclusion that conflicts in the republics of the North Caucasus are usually compound and complex in nature. There can also be multilateral and long-term conflicts rooted not only in the specific group interests, but also in fundamental ideological values.

The author identifies the reasons that give rise to conflicts in the republics of the North Caucasus as follows: economics; politics; social stratification; ethno-politic, historical and cultural background; religious differences; and search of identity. The potential of ethno-political elites in stabilizing the political situation in the North Caucasus is not used to its fullest extent. This is largely due to the lack of a sound regulatory strategy of the federal elites vis-à-vis the regional political elites.

The author comes to the conclusion that an effective governing of the region requires not only a clear understanding of its current socio-economic and political state, but also a detailed knowledge of its history, culture and traditions.

VALENTINA SCHENSNOVICH. COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA, KYRGYZSTAN, KAZAKHSTAN, TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN WITHIN THE SCO AND THE EAEU // *The analytical review was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

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Valentina Schensnovich,
Research Associate,
Department of Asia and Africa, INION RAN