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ASIYAT BOTASHEVA. PROBLEMS OF THE ELITE CONFLICT IN KARACHAYEVO-CIRCASSIA // *Article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: political power, political elite, elite conflict, federal elite, regional elite, civil society, Karachayevo-Circassia.

Asiyat Botasheva,
PhD(Politics), Professor,
Institute of International Relations,
Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University

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Abstract. Political elite is a social group that has risen to political "stardom" as claiming to exercise authority and control the masses. The elites are undoubtedly generated by social inequality rather than unequal amounts of talent or individual, spiritual other differences. Elite education, professional success, great ambitions, extensive expertise, standing in society, the right connections, assertiveness, etc. are of great importance.

When describing political elites V.A. Kruchkov, A.K. Skovikov and O.N. Titov state the following: "By combining numerous definitions of the elite, one can identify its most common characteristics, such as domination and exploitation (K. Marx), great competence (V. Pareto), superior organization skills (G. Mosca), authority and moral superiority (S. Keller, L. Boden), prestige (H. Lasswell) and creativity (A. Toynbee). Most authors, while noting the relativity of the concept of "elite", agree that real power, ability to influence the course of events, access to resources and strong social standing are the main features of the elite. The elite is a minority that controls the majority" [9].

The author notes that peculiarities of the formation and development of the political elite in Russia are source of debate. Researchers from the South-Russian Institute of Management of Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (SRIM RANEPa), who study the Russian and regional political elite, register a diverse range of opinions on the maturity of the Russian elite. They report that "in 2016, about 80 per cent of experts used the term quasi-elite" and note that "the assessment was significantly more negative if compared with the results of the expert survey in 2013" [1]. Followers of the Rostov school suggest that "neither composition, nor management behaviour and legitimacy of modern elites are well-established. Moreover, on a number of indicators elites show signs of deviance" [5]. Some experts contend that in the face of new political and economic challenges posed by geopolitical rivals of Russia, traditional models of leadership can be considered outdated; therefore, the structure of power requires optimization, as well as there is a need in "new approaches, comprising not only traditional methods of bolstering management activities, but also strategies enabling to pave the best way to achieve the goal" [11]. Describing regional elites as a whole, the researchers rightly point out to "inefficiencies of the democratic mechanisms for selecting new members of the elite, fostering career advancement of the right people who primarily

pursue personal and group interests" [1]. The Yug expert and analytical centre, in cooperation with the Club Regionov federal expert network, has carried out a joint study on elite conflicts in the North Caucasian Federal District and the Southern Federal District. The study confirms the findings of the political scientists from the Rostov School. The research materials published in 2020 indicate that "conflicts among elites proved to be one of the most intense in the south of the country"; the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic ranked second in the rating of 15 regions with tense elite-related conflicts [8].

The author observes that post-Soviet Karachayevo-Circassia is characterized by strong trends towards elite conflicts. Researchers have always pointed to the complexity of interethnic relations, increasing crime rates, including youth crime, uncontrolled migration, growing threat of drug trafficking, increasing presence of radical religious groups, etc. At present, some of the above-mentioned problems have become less pressing than at the end of the last century. However, the Yug expert and analytical centre study entitled "Measuring elite conflicts in the southern regions of Russia" indicates that increasing conflict among elites in the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic has reached a critical level and is estimated at eight points out of ten. Moreover, opponents to the existing elites in the republic have stepped up their efforts a great deal. According to the experts, the head of the republic Rashid Temrezov is under too much pressure from the opposing parties in comparison with his colleagues from other regions of the North Caucasian Federal District. Consequently, Temrezov's primary objective is to extend the term of office of the head of the republic as much as possible, since as a political figure he seeks to ensure the appointment of a successor and avoid potential criminal prosecution, which is possible due to the imbalance between interests of opposing political elites in the republic; furthermore, experts conclude that the head of the republic is in an extremely precarious position [8].

It should be noted that there is traditionally no unified vision of the republic's political and economic course in the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic and therefore trend towards the imbalance of the political elites is on the rise. Nevertheless, Rashid Temrezov has been the head of the republic consistently since 2011. This means that the young politician enjoys the support of both the influential clans of the republic and the federal government; moreover, without much political experience he managed to achieve a balance in the demanding context of constant elite-related conflict in the republic. Nevertheless, one can reasonably predict that the end of his term of office in September 2021 will trigger a new round of conflict between political elites in the republic.

The author notes that political confrontation between the elites in the republic is especially intense for a number of objective and subjective reasons. The key determinants are: historically rooted resentment; extremely high stratification of society; dwindling incomes of average citizens of the republic; and strategic geographical position of the republic, bordering Stavropol Krai in the north, Krasnodar Krai in the west, the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic in the east and Georgia and Abkhazia in the south. Also, the parties opposing the existing government make use of "ethnization of the conflict and speculation on existing or contrived ethno-religious, ethno-linguistic and other contradictions" [12], contributing to the escalation of the situation in the multinational republic of Karachayevo-Circassia. Thus, in November, 2018, the Cherkess and Abazin groups signed a mass petition to the President, requesting the permission to break away from the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic. They based the petition on ethnic oppression and violation of tacit national equality (distribution of significant posts in the republic between representatives of five ethnic groups). These claims were earlier voiced in a letter to the President, which contained a petition for a representative of the

Abazin diaspora to retain the post of head of the Federal Tax Service for the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic [10].

The author points to the fact that the fight against corruption in the republic plays an important role in escalating the elite rivalry and, at the same time, contributes to a new balance of power. The clampdown on large criminal groups that began in 2019 affected the interests of powerful political figures in the region; in particular criminal cases were opened against Raul Arashukov and his son Rauf Arashukov (advisor to the general director of Gazprom Mezhhregiongaz and senator of the Russian Federation, respectively). According to media sources, the Arashukovs organized a criminal group and exploited connections not only in the officialdom, but also in law enforcement agencies; there was “a law enforcement bloc of 10–12 people in high positions that covered up for the Arashukovs” [6].

Similarly, in 2020, the region’s law enforcement bloc was purged following the reopening of criminal cases related to A. Kaitov, who had been convicted of murder of seven people. The media reports that “there is an ongoing investigation into embezzlement of approx. 1 billion roubles from the energy sector of the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic, which until recently was controlled by Kaitov. A dozen cases of embezzlement from Avtodor (road building enterprise) are being investigated. This enterprise used to be fully controlled by Kaitov, with his relatives and friends in the leadership. Also, police are investigating cases of embezzlement of funds from Vodokanal (water supply enterprise), which passed into the ownership of the Kaitov family in a mysterious way. And now they are reopening the investigation into several unsolved killings in the republic...” [2].

In 2020, there was an open confrontation between the elites in connection with the Cherkessk mayoral election. Supporters of the late S. Derev, former mayor of Cherkessk, Avtodor CEO A. Kaitov, acting mayor E. Belanova and others were involved in the conflict.

The author notes that all significant political developments in the republic have been accompanied by increased activity of the opposition to the head of the republic. As political scientist E. Shcherbina has said, “ahead of the end of the governor’s term in 2021, politicking is heating up”, propelling new information attacks and fake news [3].

Thus, a constant conflict of elites in the republic is attributed to a number of factors that determine the outbursts of political scandals, formation of cliques and backing different leaders. According to A. Ebzeev and U. Adzhiev, “in the multiethnic subjects (regions) of Russia, a change in the style of management resulted in a bifurcation of the functions of regional elites: in addition to their direct functions in the governmental structure, they also had latent but dominant ones.” They believe that there are functions enshrined in the constitutions of the constituent elements of the Federation, which therefore should be considered by the political elites, and there are also parallel directives of the federal government. The very change in the formation of the political elite in post-Soviet Russia entailed the rotation of the Soviet era political elite – the former Communist “nomenklatura”. The establishment of a fundamentally new system of relations between the federal and regional governments caused a certain imbalance in the functioning of the newly formed political elite both in the centre and in the regions [14].

The 21st century is without doubt a unique century, since the development of technological capacities, science and new technologies – such as robotics, nanotechnology, the digital world, etc. – has leaped forward. As for systems of governance, they remain the same: unitary state, federation and confederation. Without calling for a change in centuries-old state structures, we nevertheless note that most leading countries are federal states or gravitate to federalism. Thus, European countries are divided into separate administrative and territorial entities that have full legal and political independence, but retain subordination to a central government. The U.S. has purposefully

opted for federalism and seeks to democratically decentralize State authority. And the main advantage of this system of governance is that it eliminates the possibility of usurpation of power and blocks takeover by an authoritarian ruler.

Russian scholars are rather pessimistic about Russian federalism ("Russian Federalism at the Modern Stage: Stagnation or Simulation?" [4]) and define it as "unitary federalism" [13]. The researchers also take into account the fact that in Russia relations between the federal government and federal subjects (regions) are traditionally rigid, which is reflected in legislation. In the view of S. Turusin, the unitarization of Russia is evidenced by the following trends and provisions:

- 1) the federal government independently implements "comprehensive legislative regulation on all issues under shared jurisdiction";

- 2) the delimitation of competence between the Federation and its subjects is reduced;

- 3) the heads of the federal districts can apply supervisory powers over the regional authorities;

- 4) the office of the plenipotentiary representative of the president has been granted control over key regional authorities, etc.

It may be concluded from the above that firstly, there is a possibility of forming similar executive bodies in federal districts, and secondly, a certain intermediate level of governance between the federal and regional levels is emerging in Russia. S. Turusin rightly concludes that such a level of control of power is not provided for by the Constitution and as a result, the federal government has no mechanisms to control the activities of plenipotentiaries, which means no "control over controllers" [13].

Without political and economic independence, the governors find themselves under pressure from both the central government and local elites. As a result, the elite conflict that is supposed to ensure checks and balances and build a certain consensus in the society, turns into a "war" of compromising evidence, loud political slogans and pursuit of private economic

interests under the pretext of fighting political competitors. There is also an increase in clan centralization (since it is possible to withstand political turmoil as a group, not necessarily a group of relatives) and continuing politicization of non-political factors such as economic, environmental and other civic initiatives.

In the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic, there is an increased emergence of new political elites due to the following factors:

- bid to have the same preferences as other political forces at the pinnacle of power;
- desire to preserve businesses and shield them from encroachments of the current clique in power;
- wish to gain riches and benefits from the governor's office;
- aspiration to have preferences from allocation of budgetary resources and perquisites of high offices;
- desire to invest in political power;
- lack of ability to influence legislative initiatives in the region;
- lobbying the interests of certain influential clans;
- high decile coefficient of income differentiation in the republic;
- increase of the Gini index in the country, including the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic, etc.

As a result, in the small republic there are a strong tendency to rally around plenty of political figures and rather high pluralism of opinions.

The author notes that S. Starovoitov, the CEO of the Club Regionov federal expert network and the head of the expert council for the Yug analytical centre, rightly points out that in the current atmosphere of political competition possible opponents to the governors are: [12]

- from among federal actors: certain representatives of the Presidential administration, members of the Federation Council, State Duma deputies, officials from the envoy's offices, as well as influential businessmen and officials from state corporations;

- from among regional actors: leaders of parliamentary parties and local political elites, influential regional entrepreneurs and congressmen;
- governors of other regions if they compete for the federal funding and large-scale infrastructure projects, have a territorial dispute or personal conflict;
- leaders of public opinion, aspiring for key positions at the federal and regional levels;
- influential social activists who advocate for the “green” agenda, among other things.

The author expands this list by adding leaders of public opinion, leaders of political opposition, television and show business stars, heads of financial and industrial groups and other famous people who support the protest rhetoric against the existing government.

Analysts opine that the elite conflict in the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic is a stark reflection of the same process at the federal level – at the level of the “struggle of the Kremlin towers” [12].

Researchers suggest that there is a need for continuous monitoring of the conflict potential in the republic and further expert analysis of the elite conflict in the regions; the escalation of the conflict between political elites and “the loss of control over this conflict can seriously undermine the political system of the state or region, even damage the legitimacy of the authorities and paralyze their functioning” [12].

The author concludes that the republic, as well as Russia as a whole, can develop through either evolution or involution. Further reforms, domestic and foreign policies, a balance between different courses of development and welfare of the people depend greatly on the competence of the federal and regional political elites of Russia. United political elites and a consensus between differently vectored political interests would facilitate strengthening of the society of Russia, which is vital due to increased globalist pressure on Russia.

The national interests of Russia set new rules for the elite: be mindful of their responsibility to the people, be ready to implement reforms and introduce improvements that reflect the aspirations of the enlightened and educated elite, not of those who care about enrichment while imitating the frenzied activities for the benefit of society. A. Kankia maintains that “if the current Russian ruling elite continues to disgracefully imitate development, there may be a social explosion similar to social disruptions in Tunisia, Kyrgyzstan and Egypt” [7]. This means eliminating corrupt officials and incompetent leaders from the Russian elite and drawing the attention of the elite to the moral, cultural and educational machinery. The elites must act in accordance with the principles aimed at solving national problems and addressing universal needs. Also matters ‘human dimension’ of activities, whose primary objective is a public good.

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Ksenia ATAMALI,

Editor, Department of Asia and Africa,
INION RAN

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