

DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v6i4.1185

Citation: Mallakurbanov, A., Baboshina, E., Abdulaeva, I., & Guseinova, I. (2017). Institutional Factors Affecting the North Caucasus Region in Connection to its Russian Identification. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 6(4), 416-424. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v6i4.1185>

Institutional Factors Affecting the North Caucasus Region in Connection to its Russian Identification

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the general problems of development of the North Caucasus region and various aspects of its investigation. This theme was not easy for scientists and analysts at all times, and it cannot be understood in a one-dimensional measurement. In general the Caucasus has provided and continues to exert considerable influence on the formation and development of the Russian identity and this is both theoretical and practical importance for us. Therefore much attention is paid to the present situation in Russian society, its ability to meet the challenges of the times in a rapidly changing world and changes in domestic and foreign policy on its southern borders. The paper presents different approaches to analysis and different comments on them. But all Russian researchers are united in one thing - in the understanding and preservation of this unique region as an integral part of the Russian state and Russian identity.

Keywords: North Caucasus, Republic, Ethnicity, Migration, Conflict, National policy, Political process.

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1. Introduction

The Republic of Dagestan is located at the junction of Europe and Asia and borders by land and the Caspian Sea to five countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran), which are not focused only on Russia. Today, almost all states bordering the North Caucasus region exploit religious and ethnic factor trying to supplant the Caucasus from the sphere of Russia's national interests, sometimes even using force. In these difficult circumstances and the situation of the policy of sanctions, Russia has to pursue an active foreign policy and even has small, but the first victories which are not recognized stubbornly by so called Western “partners”.

2. The North Caucasus issues

The North Caucasus has always been one of the most difficult regions of the Russian Federation in politics and social relations. It is due to the fact that All-Russian and global influence is connected here with national characteristics. The Caucasus region today is a zone of vital interests and the global arena of rivalry between Russia's geopolitical competitors. We are talking about countries such as the USA, Turkey and oil-producing countries of the Arab East.

Reality confirms the idea that the Republic of Dagestan takes a special place in the Caucasus region. It is a unique phenomenon of historically loyal cooperation and ethnic consolidation of more than 30 indigenous ethnic groups, compactly living in a relatively small area (50,300 sq. Km). Researchers believe, not without reason, that being a southern outpost of Russia and occupying a key position in the North Caucasus, Dagestan defines the main vectors of development among the majority of republics in this region. It is important in terms of the prospects of the Russian state and the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (Gadzhimuradova, 2008).

The North Caucasus region has been the scene of sharp political debate and pragmatic interests of separate countries and groups of countries and even civilizations for many centuries. This fact confirms the well-known Samuel Huntington's (1996) hypothesis about “the clash of civilizations”. Ethno-political situation is complicated here also because of the migration process with its peculiarities. And in a globalized world, frequently changing priorities and directions of foreign policy and the performance deterioration of the world economy, problems and prospects of development in the North Caucasus region cannot remain outside the scrutiny of the government. The federal government do a lot for this, for example there is the most important “priority funding” for the North Caucasian republics,

strengthening law enforcement and the military component of the region, the key decisions on personnel policy, addressing the most pressing social and economic problems and some other issues.

3. Public, national and scientific interest in the problem of the North Caucasus

Among those measures we can name scientific, cultural and other significant events which are held by the public authorities. In particular, in December 2015 in Makhachkala there were held international political science forum dedicated to the problems of the North Caucasus. Politicians, public figures and scientists discussed a wide range of issues concerning this unique “Caucasian civilization”, with respect to which the power has no tangible, perceived and adequate “national policy” in its traditional sense. So, it was said in the reports of the speakers that “nowadays a balanced system of management in the sphere of the state national policy at every level of government is built – both at the federal, regional and municipal. It has all the tools to take the necessary and timely decisions” (Safaraliev, 2015); that “the North Caucasian civilization community is unique because it is originated and exists as comprehensive transnational response to the challenges of history ... in a common life and the struggle of peoples of different ethno-linguistic affiliation for their land, for the ideals and values of their ancestors”, and “the only way to preserve tradition is its preservation through the update” (Gorshkov, 2015); that “on the question of Russian national identity ... we have found clear formula to ensure the unity and diversity of the Russian nation and the state” (Tishkov, 2015); that “the processes running in the North Caucasus are the projection of ... global trends”, but “to send them in a positive direction it is necessary to find a new political form of coordination of interests, considering the mentality of the Caucasian peoples and new common goals and values that can unite them to each other, and other nations of Russia” (Shabrov, 2015) and other conceptual ideas and suggestions. Terms and fragments of the reports also convinced that in the region of the North Caucasus there is not any “ethnic crisis” or “ethnic conflict” but there are simple and often selfish intentions and objectives of politicians, businessmen, lobbyists, “foreign friends” and “partners”. Everything is too mixed up in this region, and the task of the researcher and the politician is to separate the logical from random, and mainly from the secondary, superficial.

4. Ratings and some discrepancies in the statement of issues and “recipes” of its decision

From the outset, we have to recognize that not everyone shares the optimism of the politicians and researchers. As for example Professor L.Y. Podvojsky considers that South Russia is a region where the post-industrial tendencies are connected with pre-industrial moral values

existing within centuries. It is a significant obstacle for modernization of Russian society. In the near future this process has to be solved and all contradictions should be removed and not through conflict but through synthesis (Podvojsky, 2007). In this aspect of the issue one of the most controversial one is still the concept of “national identity”, the approaches to which among the Russian and foreign analysts remain controversial (Belousov & Dibirov, 2010; Barth, 1996; Deutsch, 1979; Wallerstein, 1991). One of the greatest threats to “public entities” of the North Caucasus are internal conflicts, appeared with the introduction of “general democratic order” of the Yeltsin era and has not changed under Putin. And the persons are the same – from the “wise rulers” to “the wisest enlightener”. Fundamentally approaches have not changed and in general the very essence of national policy. Moreover the significance of the main department of Russia’s national policies relegated from the “ministry” level to the ‘agency” led by a former officer of artillery. And many other facts confirm our “guess” about the disengagement (or ignorance) of authority from solving national policy problems (Zaharchenko, 2016). As we can see, one way or another, the essence of the government’s actions in this area is aimed at a certain elevation of “local affairs”, solving the problems of the loyal to the center elites, but with the electoral benefits for themselves. For example, the government of Republic of Dagestan “gives” from 95 to 98% of electoral support to Putin and The United Russia Party (although in December 1995 in Dagestan 43.57% of the electorate voted for the Communist Party and in June 1996, 63.2% of the votes were cast for the Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov. Just for 7-8 years, despite the difficult economic situation, people were replaced as if aliens). In 2016 the republic with a population of about 3 million people is planned to issue grants that are much more than subsidies for 5 subjects of the central part of Russia combined. There is approximately the same situation with subsidies for Bashkortostan, Ingushetia and the Chechen Republic (Rashkin & Obuhov, 2016). Here elections take place on pre-known scenarios too and with results that nobody can change or recognize them as invalid – in all this republics “the principles of federalism”, “identity”, “specificity vessels” are dominated and interesting phenomenon for criminologists and investigators among election commissions of different levels. Therefore, even taking into account the existing “objective need” to help “turbulent republics”, such generosity is clearly questionable. It really seems that such measures are used for “semblance of regional loyalty to the federal center, and a short-term stabilization” (Gorishnij, 2010). The only question is how long will be continue the “short duration” and “stability”.

5. Some of the forecasts and the reality of the political process

Ten years ago, in 2006, one of the famous experts on ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus, Professor V. Avksentjev assumed the following main and possible directions of development of the political process in the region:

1. Positive (gradual de-escalation of conflicts and reduce social tensions, the gradual post-conflict stabilization).
2. Negative (rising negative trends, the rise of mass movements and discontent with the authorities, the emergence of other authorities and separatism, the outflow of the Russian population, the activity of non-governmental organizations and so on.).
3. Moderate Scenario (protraction of the conflict for a long time and use to overcome it tested “classical measures”).
4. The so-called “alarmist” scenario (rejection of the central and eastern Fore-Caucasus from Russia). And V. Avksentjev considered the option of “moderate scenario” of this process the most probable. But, as we see today, the development of process by the efforts of the country’s leadership has gone on “positive scenario” and expert’s conclusions were hasty (Avksent'ev, 2006).

Today more than ever the role of geopolitical factors in the North Caucasus region is important. This region has become “the solar plexus of Eurasia” in politics. It is generally accepted by almost all researchers. But you cannot deny the fact that 200 years ago and during the Soviet era “the powers that be” were interested in the Caucasus as much as today. In Soviet times these and similar national policy issues have been under tight control of the ruling party and the leaders of the country and the vacuum, where politicians, intelligence, and Wahhabis penetrated, was formed in the early 90’s and later. Then there were some “forecasts” that “Russia will become the scene of the most violent conflicts” with the “dismemberment in the new geo-political blocks” (Aliev, 2008) and to the level of “local thinking” about the “loss of the North Caucasus”, “a quiet withdrawal from its colonies” (Petrov, 1998).

6. Back to beginnings: attempts to interpret the “old” on a new

Quite interesting for research and analysis is the fact that all modern “state institutions” in the North Caucasus in the RSFSR were autonomous entities – not only legally, but also in fact. And it has been for 70 years of Soviet rule. This fact has been completely forgotten by “modern scientists and researchers”. Considering the backward, it is difficult to imagine how and through what institutional factors and changes autonomy suddenly, literally in one day,

were in the status of the republics? Although objectively it is impossible but in politics of adventures and anarchy it is quite established practice, especially after the famous phrase: “Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow”. You may recall that even ontologically “autonomy” was deeply studied by people of different views – from Bauer (1909), Kautskiy, Lenin, Stalin to modern scholars and politicians (Mihajlov, 2012; Tishkov, 2005; Habrieva, 2003), whose views and approaches have had a significant impact not only on science but also on national policies of many states. Therefore we have to state that in matters of national policy the country's leadership actually returned to the concept of the Austrian Social-Democrats of Bauer and Springer on the so-called “national-cultural autonomy”. In particular the deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation Georgy Safaraliev recognized that “after the abolition of the Ministry of Regional Development in the implementation of the powers of the state national policy came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture of Russia” (Safaraliev, 2015). This is a landmark step to the direction of “Bauer-Springer” concept. In our opinion and according to the real state of affairs it is not justified. We consider that this scientific concept (and the problems at the same time) has not only historical, cultural and scientific aspect, but also really class approach. That is why it got such extension in the Russian leadership's policy. It should take into account the growing importance of such factors as globalization of political, economic, cultural relations and communication in the world, including in the North Caucasus (Baboshina et al., 2015). It involves entering into a world on the basis of their own interests and their own ideas about Russia's place in this world.

7. Conclusion

The Russian state has to constantly be strengthened, especially its structural role in interethnic dialogue in the North Caucasus, using centuries-old traditions and their reasonable combination of economic realities, as well as its own geopolitical interests of Russia. This includes many of the settings of the global process, including historical background, a confessional orientation, traditions and customs, and even ethnic borders. There can be more fully used the potential of immigrants from the North Caucasus republics who live in the capitals and big Russian cities to solve not only economic but also cultural and legal tasks because all we are still a single, indivisible and democratic state.

In sum, regulatory and supervisory role of the state and politics of talented statesmen is rather vital for resolution of these important issues for the society without which all requests will remain abstract projects and system in the Caucasus can seriously change.

Conflict of interests

The authors confirm that the represented information does not contain any conflict of interests.

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