Historical Experience of Interaction Between the Federal Government and the National Movements in the Don Region and Northern Caucasus in the First Half of the 1990s

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Abstract: The first half of the 1990s was the period of establishment of the new Russian state on the new political, socio-economic and administrative-territorial principles. “Parade of sovereignties”, which became the most clear example of the transition period from Soviet to the Russian State system, most clearly manifested in Don Region and Northern Caucasus. Actively formed national movements in these regions advocated the creation of independent states, recognition of the rights of self-determination of numerous nationalities inhabiting the region and the implementation of the claims on the administration of economic resources. The political situation in the region was affected by conflicts between members of different movements for the possession of adjacent territories that were established as a result of the Soviet administrative and territorial politics. The position of the federal authorities at this stage consisted, on the one hand, in the maneuvering between the requirements of the provincial political organizations, implementation of the legal and advisory methods of interaction and on the other hand, in the implementation of the so-called “power methods of administration” through the introduction of Federal troops and military pressure on the local leaders.

Key words: Federal authorities in Russia · Local political organizations · The Don Region · National movements · The Northern Caucasus · Ethnic society · National relations · National conflicts · “Parade of sovereignties” · Cossacks · Power methods of administration.

INTRODUCTION

The intensification of protests directed against the regional and central authorities became a specific characteristic of the interaction between the central authorities and the national movements of the Don Region and Northern Caucasus in the first half of the 1990s. The studies of this historical situation are different in estimates caused by the involvement of the experts into the regional socio-political changes [1, pp. 127-146; 2, pp. 359–380; 3, p. 43; 4, pp. 88–91]. Expressed by F. Sadikov, the relations between the central and the provincial authorities characterized by stereotypes about the dictates of the center dominated in the public consciousness until the middle of 1990s that enhanced the regionalization [5, pp. 43–66; 6, p. 7]. A. Matveev and A. Khrenov named the primacy of informal institutions (belonging to any group, personal acquaintances, telephone right, barter and clientelism) and first of all the institute of bilateral agreements as the specific feature of the early development of the Russian post-Soviet state system [7, p. 47; 8, pp. 681–705; 9, p. 215–255].

The approach to the study of the interaction between central authorities in Russia with the national public organizations in the North Caucasus was based on the modernization of the southern leaders [10, 11] and classification of the Russian frontiers of A. Kapeller [12, pp. 47–64; 13]. This concept was revised by researchers in the theory of the “southern frontier”, according to which, there is specific development of the region consisting in transformation of the South of Russia, whose population has no uniform life principles and official orders come from the various administrative centers into the provinces related with the other regions by the uniform legal norms, disciplinary practices and vertically upward hierarchy [14, pp. 578–601; 15, p. 31; 16, pp. 97-132].

In 1990s, the Federal Government during considered period had sufficient information about the situation occurred in the regions of the South of Russia. In this
regard, the constantly increasing number of people with military weapons in the region and the conclusions of the experts of the Committee for National Affairs on the lack of prospects and limitation of the possible import of weapons in the Republic of the North Caucasus are interesting because even before the conflicts “... the safety of the population was significantly high” [17, fol. 8]. Such a position of experts, the appeals of the Federal Government to disband the armed groups to surrender their weapons caused in majority of cases, the opposite reaction in the region, which “… strengthened the illegal import of weapons from other regions ... Georgia, the Baltic countries and the Islamic States” [17, fol. 8]. Intervention of the international community significantly destabilized the situation in the southern regions and eliminated the opportunity to regain control of the Federal Government.

Assessments of the experts on the situation in the South of Russia was also important to assess the national movement and the party used the “errors and miscalculations of the officials” in the struggle for power in the region [17, fol. 9]. Thus, the experts of the Committee on Ethnic Relations, describing the destabilizing factors in 1992 in the Krasnodar, Stavropol and Rostov region noted the competition for the local authorities between state bodies and Cossacks. For example, in Krasnodar region, they drew attention to the intention of the Cossacks “cleanse” the exact location from “foreigners” and creation the new state name to “The Don Republic”, “popular among the Cossacks” [17, fol. 9]. However, the Federal Government underestimated the cognitive threat to the territorial integrity of the state, established by the end of 1992 tracing the development of the situations in the southern regions in details. Interregional conflicts for possession of the common territories were hardly considered by the politicians as the threat of they political influence and authority. Nationalism, its appearance in the public and political movements, penetration into the regional authorities was perceived as a temporary factor, associated with the self-determination of nations and the eradication of Soviet political traditions. The reluctance of grain-growers of the Stavropol and Rostov regions “… to sell wheat grain at current purchase prices” [18, fol. 31] and the possible establishment of the state of the titular nation in the Southern Russian Republics [18, fol. 30-31] were considered by the experts as the most probable threats for the territorial and national integrity.

Active position of national movements was abated by the smoothing of their disunity. The possible use of weapons was substantiated by the use in “... the international conflicts and deteriorated economic situation” [18, fol. 31]. However, the observations and conclusions of the experts made during business trips to the regions in the early 1990s, have provided the Federal Government with extensive material. It could be used further to formulate a regional politics in various sfears, including in the Federative relations, optimization of administrative management, – more appropriate to the specific features of particular regions in the South of Russia.

The creation of military Cossack groups (districts), which demanded of the restoration of Cossack self-government, economic independence of the Cossack territories in the historically residences of the Cossacks caused the distrust of the southern regions to the Federal Government. In turn, the national movements have seen in the requirements of the Cossacks, a revival of the Imperial order and infringement on their rights. This situation moves in the growth of anti-Russian moods in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Adygea, on the one hand and the consolidation of the Cossacks on the other [18, fol. 7]. According to letters of the ataman of the Kizlyar district of Terek Cossack army A.S. Elzon and the Chairman of the National Soviet of Karachay B. Batchaev, addressed to the Chairman of the Soviet Federation of RSFSR V.F. Shumeiko, the national movement “Kazi-Kumukh” has acquired significant influence in the region, whose leader M. Khachilaev determined the main program goal as the “path to unity and independence- long, but inevitable”. In this regard, the representatives of the Cossacks demanded from the representatives of the governmental authorities to enter a “direct Federal governance in the territory” and “a moratorium on changing of the borders in the name of interests of Russian, Cossack and Nogai population” [19, fol. 1-4].

The Federal Government has maneuvered between the requirements of the regional political organizations. This process clearly confirms the response to the request of the Great Don Arms to the President B. Yeltsin to consider the possible guarantees from the government for receiving of foreign investment loan in amount of one hundred million US dollars for the development of agriculture and industry in Don Region. The Ministry of Nationalities of the Russian Federation has refused to guarantee this loan motivating this fact that the issuance of this document “to particular organization may cause a negative reaction from others and will be perceived as
distinguishing of its special position in the general movement for the revival of the Cossacks’ at a multiplicity of “completely autonomous Cossack societies and associations on the territory of Russia...” [19, fol. 29-31].

As the result of the meeting of special session of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, held on November 10–11, 1991 for discussion the Decree of the President of RSFSR on November 7, 1991, “On introduction of the state of emergency in the Chechen-Ingush Republic” [17, fol. 9], the resolution, which marked the lawfulness of the actions of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the President of the RSFSR has been adopted. It is important that in this document, the government acknowledged own mistakes in the implementation of the regional politics, by noting in particular that “... the public act of November 7, 1991, was undeveloped” [17, fol. 9] therefore it is impossible to adopted the Decree of the President of the RSFSR “On introduction of the state of emergency...” in practice due to the weak authority of governmental influence in the region. The possibilities of political power in the regions were overlooked, the Supreme Soviet of RSFSR has adopted a decision to further regulating of the crisis by policy measures instead of use of the emergency funds [17, fol. 10].

A complete situation of the status of political forces in the South of Russia was presented in 1994 by V. Erin, the Head of the Ministry of Nationalities of Russia Century in the official letter addressed to V.S. Chernomyrdin, the Chairman of the Government [20, fol. 6–7]. According to the data provided in the letter, the national movements and groups are increasingly turning into a power political force, claiming the leadership of the social-political life in the Southern regions. However, the Minister was alerted by “the expanding process of regions, for example, by economic settlement, social inclusion of the local leaders which demonstrated anti-Russian and separatist sentiments in republic’s level of authorities”. Local leaders organized the governing and ideological structures and sometimes the militarized groups. V. Erin gave an example of the Confederation of Caucasian nations, which has transformed into the alliance of the separatist forces, largely determining the relationships in the North Caucasus [20, fol. 6–7] with active executive, legislative and judicial authorities of “confederative state”, elected the Parliament of 42 persons and organized “Caucasian Legion” to protect the interests of the Confederation [20, fol. 7].

Such a position of V. Erin the strategic plans of the most radical public organizations of Kabardino-Balkaria include the withdrawal of Kabarda from the Russian Federation and the creation of united Circassian State. It was recorded in the documents of All-Circassian National Fund “Khekush Khase” [20, fol. 7]. The Congress of Kabardian people has defined the general objectives for 1992–1995 as “... the creation of political conditions for the transition of authority to the Congress” [20, fol. 7]. V. Erin has also noted that during 1993 in Dagestan, the Kumyk people movement “Tenglik” (“Equality”) continued agitation people for establishment of Kumik Republic, Lezgin national movement “Sadval” (“Unity”) for Lezgistan, Nogay movement “Birlik” for autonomy located in the districts of Dagestan, the Chechen Republic and the Stavropol region. There were territorial claims between Laks and Chechens – Akkins. Influential Ingush nationalistic party “Niyşkho” has also supported an idea of the joining of the Prigorodniy district of North Ossetia to Ingush Republic [20, fol. 8]. Moreover, federal movements of the Slavic peoples became more powerful during 1993 that resulted in the conclusion of the Minister on the transformation of the “Russian problem” in the key factor of political struggle in Russia. In this regard, V. Erin suggested to V.S. Chernomyrdin, first, to develop a mechanism of elimination of the national movements and groups, which activities extended over declared objectives in programs and regulations; secondly, to organize the special coordinating center on conflict solving at the Government of the Russian Federation [20, fol. 8]. However, there were no mechanisms developed and this problem was solved by methods of force.

The adoption of the decision on prohibition of regional parties, regardless of the legal form, in fact, can also be attributed to methods of force because it was hardly related with any consensus and other, more complex forms of solving of the political situation in the regions, for example, by economic settlement, social reform, etc. [21, art. 503; 22, art. 2950]. The radical measures were among the high priorities and anticipated the use of other methods. The Federal Government preferred to “extinguish” the problem in the Southern Region and then use a more peaceful reforms. The power methods, however, have failed to solve the existing problems and ensured the necessary time for further reforms.

Thus, political movements in the Don Region and Northern Caucasus in the first half of the 1990s were formed on the ideas of sovereignty and national self-determination. These regions in this period were an area of prolonged conflict caused by the weakness of the governmental authorities in the country in general. The main features of interaction between governmental authorities and national movements included the
governmentally uncontrolled armed forces and a competition for the real power in the regions. The national movements and groups increasingly turned into a political force, claiming the leadership of the social-political life in the Don Region and the North Caucasus. Nationalism was perceived by the Federal Government as a temporary factor, related with the self-determination of nations and eradication of Soviet political traditions. The economic protests caused the great apprehensions of the governmental authorities. The accomplishing of the demands of regional forces, there was the question on the prevention of the dissemination of “terrorist threat” to the neighboring territories. This stimulates the actions of the central governmental authorities to solve the territorial and administrative problems in the Southern Russia and transition from “maneuvering” measures to implementation of the so-called methods of “force” in the form of armed intervention or pressure on the local leaders.

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REFERENCES

