

# **Securing a balance in interethnic relations: regional autonomies, the state integrity and the rights of ethnic minorities**

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### **Abstract**

The project aimed at identifying conditions of ethnic regional autonomy's (ERA) effectiveness in achieving and maintaining a balance in interethnic relations, securing the state integrity and the rights of ethnic minorities. The activity of the project team was focused on the development of the theoretical and methodological foundations for the study and regulation of interethnic relations in the context of world and domestic experience (project task P8-1) and comparative analysis of the functioning of the Russian and foreign ERAs in order to identify the best approaches and methods for regulating interethnic relations (project task P8-4).

In the framework of the first task, a comprehensive concept structure of 'ethnic regional autonomy' has been developed. ERA has been defined as an administrative-territorial unit of the first sub-national level, which is constituted on an ethnic basis and within the priority of the national state has a sufficiently high degree political self-government. Thus, ERA is determined on the basis of two essential characteristics (attributes) - autonomy and ethnic character of the constitution, which are uncovered in a system of criteria and empirical indicators. From the view of this definition, the final for the project list of ethnic regional autonomies (List of ERAs), which exist at present or ceased to exist in the beginning of XXI century, has been composed. It consists of 140 cases, and is divided into two parts - the core list and the "additional" list that includes "border-line cases".

From the view of institutional approach, ethnic regional autonomy has been theoretically understood as a complex of institutional arrangements, in which respected preferences are fixed. In their combination, they form the status of autonomy. Institutional arrangements emerge as a result of actors' interactions. Two dimensions can be distinguished: interactions between regional autonomy and the central government ('the center – region – titular ethnic group') and interactions within autonomy ('region – ethnic groups'). In the first dimension, autonomous regime allows finding a balance between ethnic demands for self-rule and the integrity of the state. The second dimension concerns a balance between the preferences and interests of different ethnic groups living in the region. Based on these assumptions, the concept of a balance in interethnic relations has been exposed into an integral theoretical scheme. A balance presupposes that the actors involved in interactions continue to interact with each other in the framework of conventional ways and procedures even if they have opposed interests. The balance is the situation of the existence and maintenance of credible commitments, which assign a framework for predictable and stable interaction concerning the status of autonomy between the actors involved. 'Political subjectness' of the ERA, that is an active participation of ERA in decision-making concerning the status of autonomy, is the issue for achieving and maintaining a balance in interethnic relations. 'Subjectness' makes the balance dynamic, but at the same time problematic, challenged, that is, the likelihood of a balance imbalance increases. On the contrary, if the ERA is just an 'object', i.e. when significant for the autonomy decisions are made without its direct participation, a passive balance can be reproduced for a long time. However, it can be violated as a result of that in the context of the ERA authorities' inactivity other actors involved in the interaction, primarily ethnic groups, can manifest their 'subjectness' as a result of ethnic mobilization.

During the implementation of the project, a large amount of empirical material about all contemporary ethnic regional autonomies was collected, the set of fieldworks (expert interviews

and study of empirical materials) have been carried out in 40 regions including 14 Russian national republics and 26 foreign autonomies. As a result of data systematization, Ethnic Regional Autonomies Database (ERAD) has been developed and published on the project website (<http://identityworld.ru/index/database/0-21>). It contains a variety of information (148 variables) for all ethnic regional autonomies from the List of ERAs. The data are presented in the format "autonomy - year" and cover the period from 2001 to 2015. In-depth qualitative descriptions of all ethnic regional autonomies – profiles - have been prepared. All the profiles are available on the Atlas of ethnic regional autonomies (<http://identityworld.ru/shop>).

Methodological developments and collected empirical material have created a well-grounded foundation for completing a comparative analysis of the functioning of the Russian and foreign ERAs in order to identify the best approaches and methods for regulating interethnic relations (*project task P8-4*). The project implementation was based on the combination of quantitative large-N and qualitative small-N comparative studies. The quantitative analysis was carried out on the universal set of ERAs and based on empirical data of ERAD. It aimed at revealing the factors which influence on the onset and dynamics of ethnopolitical conflicts in the ERA. Along with this, a series of qualitative small-N comparative studies was conducted.

As a result of these studies, it was concluded that the process of creating (constituting) autonomies has a significant impact on the achievement of a balance and its nature. Thus, the correlation between ethno-national policy and the ethnic autonomy demands is particularly important. The presence of ethnic movement ("demand for autonomy") positively affects the 'subjectness' of the ERA, its activity in interactions with the central government, the ability to produce ethnic mobilization. It makes ERA be stronger political actor in interactions with the central government and facilitates, all else being equal, achieving dynamic balance in the relations around autonomy, as well as increasing the quality of the balance. On the contrary, if an ERA is given primarily "from above," this reduces the level of its 'subjectness'. The most problematic from the view of maintaining the balance around the ERA is the way, when ERA is created in spite of the desire of the state, as a forced compromise, especially if there has been a long violent confrontation.

The analysis of the correlation between ethnic and regional components in ERA's identity allows distinguishing some ideal-typical models, which have their own sources of imbalance. For the first type ("ethnic territory"), secessionist tendencies are of key importance, as well as challenging the claim for territory as belonging to the titular ethnic group from the other ethnic groups and society as a whole. In the second ("civil regionalism with ethnic color"), the typical reason for problems in interethnic relations is the strengthening of the ethnicization of territorial differences. For the third ("instrumental ethnicity"), the development of potential 'subjectness' is a significant challenge for the balance. Finally, in the fourth ("segmented identity"), all the mentioned sources of imbalance take place, since they can occur separately in each segment.

On the basis of the comparative analysis of geo-referencing data on ethnic groups in ArcGIS tools, it has been found that the spatial localization of ethnic groups influences on the patterns of interethnic interactions. Ethnic groups can be either 'spatially segregated' (they have different areas) or 'spatially mixed' (they share the same area). In the latter case, the interactions on the horizontal dimension (between ethnic segments) are much more important. In the context of 'spatially segregated' format of localization, the correlation between ethnic and political-administrative borders becomes essential, and if these boundaries are fairly congruent, a tendency to segmentation of the political space appears – either 'intra-country' (ERA becomes a segment) or 'intra-regional' (political segments appear within the ERA). In these cases, the interactions on the vertical dimension (multi-level government) are of key importance.

An analysis of the impact of contextual factors, primarily the political regime on maintaining a balance around ethnic regional autonomies, allows us to define that there is no direct dependency between them. Both the balance and the imbalance in inter-ethnic relations are possible in the context of any kind of political regimes. At the same time, the study shows that the quality of a balance and its dynamics in different contexts vary.

As one of the project results, the Atlas of Ethnic Regional Autonomies has been created and published on the project web-site (<http://identityworld.ru/shop>). The Atlas is intended for academics, experts, students, journalists as well as all users who are interested in the problems of interethnic relations. The results of the project on all period of 2015-2017 are presented in 35 academic publications including 3 monographs. 24 articles have been published in RINS academic journals, including 3 – in the Web of Science / Scopus journals. Analytical report that contains justified recommendations concerning the ways of ethno-national policy optimization has been prepared for the public authorities, ethnic organizations, and expert community. Project results, the analytical report, and the Atlas of Ethnic Regional Autonomies have been presented to the general public at the All-Russian Forum of National Unity (Perm, November 24, 2017).