

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

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Abstract

The project aims at identifying conditions of regional autonomy's effectiveness in achieving and maintaining a balance in interethnic relations, securing the state integrity and the rights of ethnic minorities. Granting territorially concentrated ethnic group regional autonomy is considered in contemporary world as one of the most common way to prevent, manage and resolve ethnic conflicts. As a political institution, ethnic regional autonomy is an almost perfect from a theoretical point of view, but it is incredibly difficult in practical realization instrument of maintaining a balance in international relations. World experience argues that the instrument is not always used effectively.

In accordance with the key tasks of the project and the plan of the project implementation, in 2015, the project team focused on the elaboration of theoretical and methodological grounds of the project and on the analysis of the world and Russian experience of ethno-political processes management from the view of maintaining a balance in interethnic relations in regional autonomies. Solving the problem of the development of theoretical and methodological grounds of the study of interethnic relations, the research team concentrated, first of all, on the operationalization of the research model. The regional (sub-national) territorial unit has been defined as «ethnic regional autonomy» when, firstly, a region has special preferences, which are reproduced in specific institutional arrangements, in comparison with other sub-national units of the same level. Secondly, these preferences have to be connected with the ethnic special features of a region.

Two basic and interconnected dimensions can be distinguished in the complex system of institutionalized preferences: relations between regional autonomy and central authorities and relations within regional autonomy. Accordingly, three groups of the key actors involved in these relations can be differentiated: central authorities, regional autonomy authorities, and ethnic groups. It is evident, that they have different views and interests concerning the content of the preferences of an autonomous regions and ethnic groups. An essential idea of an ethnic regional autonomy is to coordinate and balance these diverse views and interests institutionally. Nevertheless, actors' preferences as well as a correlation of resources between them change. Consequently, both theoretically and practically, in the process of interethnic relation management, it is crucially important to base on the assumption that a balance in interethnic relations is a dynamic, not static phenomenon. In other world, such a balance is not a full agreement between actors. Conversely, it presupposes permanent discussions and disputes concerning the content of institutionalized preferences. Nevertheless, a balance assumes that these discussions are going on in the framework of established regulatory procedures (mechanisms) of interactions. The cases when the actors exit outside institutionalized procedures of interactions and if they threaten a core function of the state, are operationally defined as conflicts, i.e. breach of a balance – an imbalance. Hence, there may be two reasons of an imbalance: first, defective in their content preferential policies; second, inadequate and weak procedures (mechanisms) of interactions between public authorities and ethnic groups, i.e. those mechanism which don't allow to coordinate and balance diverse views and interests of actors involved in so complex field as ethnic regional autonomy.

On the basis of the research model operationalization, in 2015, the list of ethnic regional autonomies – units of observation - has been compiled. It consists of 134 cases including 22

Russian ethnic autonomies (republics). Codebook has been completed, and the work on the creation of the Database of ethnic regional autonomies of contemporary world has started. A special dataset of all ethno-territorial conflicts over the world in 2001-2014 has been founded on the basis of annual monitoring Conflict Barometer. It allows identifying all cases of imbalance in interethnic relations and analyzing dynamic of ethno-territorial conflicts in contemporary world. Alongside, the work on the creation of profiles – in-depth qualitative descriptions of ethnic regional autonomies – has started. 50 profiles, including 22 Russian cases and 28 foreign autonomies, have been made in 2015. Some fieldworks (expert interviews and study of empirical materials) have been carried out in 2 foreign autonomies (Trentino-Alto Adige and Aland) in 10 Russian republics. Profiles will be updated and refined at the next stages of the project realization, although they have already allowed project team to start the analysis of world experience of regulation and management of ethno-political processes and to get the first results.

The typology of island autonomies as a special category of ethnic regional autonomies has been developed. The analysis demonstrates that the vast majority of them are the products of disintegration of empires. Consequently, depending on the nature of empire, island autonomies are divided into two types - the products of disintegration of colonial empires and the products of disintegration of continental empires. Each of these types is divided into two subtypes: inherited possession and territory, resulting from post-imperial conversion. In the first type of island autonomies it is also possible to distinguish third-level categories: aboriginal ethnic autonomies and resettlement ethnic autonomies.

The taxonomy of advisory bodies as arenas of interaction between public authorities and ethnic groups has been developed. It is based on such criteria as the type of consulting activity, subject area, and the importance of domineering. Accordingly, 4 main types of advisory bodies can be identified: 1) joint decision-making - advisory bodies are directly involved in decision-making process; 2) consultation – wide range of councils with a purely advisory function; 3) coordination - expert advisory bodies as well as ad hoc interaction with leaders of minority groups on specific issues; 4) self-government - self-organized minority bodies created to solve their internal (ethno-cultural) issues but at the same time involved in advisory activity.

The configuration of preferential policies in ethnic regional autonomy has been analyzed in comparative perspective. The analysis showed that in almost all cases, ethnic regional autonomies have preferences which strongly connected with ethnic specificity of a region. Since in most cases the ethnic specificity associated with language, language policy (language preferences) is one of the key points in maintaining a balance in interethnic relations. The study shows that the amount of such preferences depends, primarily, on the share of the titular ethnic group in the population of the autonomy. When the share is high, linguistic preferences are supposed to be as something «natural» (the Aland Islands in Finland). But in many cases, ethno-linguistic situation is more complicated and accompanied by a set of purposeful ("artificial") preferential policies of language (from teaching school to the language quotas in the civil service).

Another key point in preferential policies concerns representation of ethnic groups in the public authorities (power-sharing). Comparative analysis, which was carried out on the basis of profiles of ethnic regional autonomies demonstrates that a balance in interethnic relation in the field can be achieved in various ways. It was found that the formal institutional arrangements concerning the access of ethnic segments to government positions (quotas, etc.) are used in small number of cases. Much more frequently, ethnic (ethno-regional) political parties serve as an instrument of ethnic group representation. In the cases, where formal institutional arrangements of ethnic representation are not provided by law, and ethnic parties are banned, the other mechanisms are institutionalized for maintaining a balance in this sphere. For example, ethnicity is perceived as significant feature in recruitment of the key political positions in almost all Russian republics but a balance is secured and achieved through so called «informal institutionalization», when more or less sustainable practices occur as a result of informal agreements (conventions) that political actors follow in reality. However, the degree of

institutionalization of these practices as well as mechanisms of how ethnicity has to be taken into account varies significantly across Russian republics.

Based on the results, which have been already achieved, it is possible to be confident that every case - successful and unsuccessful - of ethnic autonomy is a unique one since an extraordinarily complex constellation of factors influences on the functioning of ethnic autonomies. Theoretical findings as well as the analysis of empirical data already collected allow identifying the most important components in this constellation: the ethnic structure of society; the importance of ethnicity for autonomist project among the other features (geographical, historical); socio-geographical and socio-economic factors (especially resource inequality between autonomy and the other - "standard" - regions); politics (nature of the regime, constitutional design, specificity of political process in autonomous region in comparison with national level) and international context (presence or absence of kin state, involvement of international actors on the affairs of ethnic regional autonomy). Also, historical legacies have a significant influence - the history of origin and evolution of the autonomous region; crystallized in historical memory conflicts, grievances in the relations between the state, autonomy, and ethnic groups; trajectory of the post-imperial development in the context of which the majority of ethnic autonomies emerged. That is why the optimal content of balanced preferences for autonomy and ethnic groups – where is the point of equilibrium in the system of preferential institutional arrangements - will be different and, moreover, dynamic in each case. Similarly, optimal procedures / mechanisms of interaction between public authorities and ethnic groups will vary in different contexts. Therefore, on the next stage of the project implementation in 2016, the series of qualitative (small-N) comparative studies will be an optimal research strategy for the study of general (more or less universal) interconnections and interdependences between the key variables – contextual factors, preferential policies, mechanisms of interactions and a balance in interethnic relations.

As a result of the project implementation in 2015, 8 articles have been prepared for the publication, including 3 – on the basis on the papers presented at some academic conferences. 6 articles have been published to the end of 2015; 1 article has been accepted for the publication and will be published in 2016; 1 article has been submitted for the publication in the Web of Science / Scopus journal. The project has been presented during academic trips for the visits the leading research centers and for fieldworks. The first results of the project have been presented in 4 papers on academic conferences.