

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

Russian Science Foundation (project №15-18-00034)

Intermediate Report - 2016

Abstract

The project aims at identifying conditions of ethnic regional autonomy's effectiveness in achieving and maintaining a balance in interethnic relations, securing the state integrity and the rights of ethnic minorities. Based on the results, which have been achieved on the first stage of the project in 2015, the conclusion has been made that the optimal content of a balance – 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, in 2016, the research strategy of the project team was to clarify theoretical and methodological foundations of the study (*project task P8-1*), to proceed with the data collection and to carry out the series of comparative studies. The key idea was by combining quantitative large-N and qualitative small-N comparative analysis, to identify relatively stable correlations between a) contextual factors, which operates ERA; b) characteristics of preferential policies; c) the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms of interaction. This makes it possible to define which approaches and methods of regulation of interethnic relations are optimal ones for the specific constellations of factors (*project task P8-4*).

The study of new data collected in 2016 allowed clarifying the concept of ‘ethnic regional autonomy’. This is a territorial unit of the first sub-national level that has a fairly high degree of political self-government (in the framework of superiority of the nation state) and special status (asymmetric preferences in comparison with other sub-national units of the same level), which connected more or less conventionally with the definite ethnic group (groups). Such a conventional interpretation is based, as a rule, on that the region is considered as a homeland of this group that is a source of granting regional autonomy. On the basis of this operational definition, the list of ethnic regional autonomies, which had been compiled in 2015, was substantially upgraded. At present, it includes 109 units in 31 countries of the world. In 2016, the Ethnic Regional Autonomies Database (ERAD) was created and it is now ready to use. It contains a wide range of information (about 150 variables) on all ethnic regional autonomies around the world, which exist at present or ceased to exist in the beginning of XXI century. In contrast to other datasets in the field of ethnic politics (UCDP / PRIO Armed conflict datasets; Minorities at Risk - MAR; Ethnic Power Relations – EPR, etc.), the units of observation in the ERAD is neither ethnic group, nor ethnic conflict, but ethnic autonomous region. ERAD is a unique dataset in the sense that although it is partially accumulate some relevant data from other datasets, it contents dozens of variables which are extracted from original sources. Its major purpose is to collect and systematize comprehensive information and supply a large selection of variables on ethnic regional autonomies for all years, 2001-2015. Accordingly, the data are presented in the format ‘autonomy-year’. It allows studying ethnic autonomies in broad comparative perspectives from the view of different research question. ERAD (in .csv, .xls., .sav. formats) and codebook are accessible on the website of the project (http://identityworld.ru/index/atlas_era/0-4).

Alongside, the work on profiles – in-depth qualitative descriptions of ethnic regional autonomies – continued; and in 2016, new 40 profiles have been made. Also, in accordance with the plan,

some fieldworks (expert interviews and study of empirical materials) have been carried out in Russian republics (Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Marii El, Udmurtiya) and foreign autonomies (Vojvodina; both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina – FBG and Republika Srpska; three Italian autonomous regions – Sardinia, Sicily, Aosta Valley; Catalonia; Gagauzia; Montenegro; Jeju).

Purposeful work on the collection of empirical data, including the creation of ERAD, the preparation of profiles, data collection during fieldworks allowed carrying out a series of comparative studies. Linguistic policies in ethnic regional autonomies as one the major areas of preferential policies have been studied specifically. The concept of “territorial linguistic regime” has been developed. It has been defined as a system of institutional arrangements regarding the usage of the language and respective pattern of behavior in the community. Distinguishing between “strong” and “weak” territorial linguistic regimes has been made on the basis of two criteria: depth and universality in the usage of language on the key arenas of interaction (the system of education and public administration). On the ground of some comparative studies, it has been found that the most important factors contributing to the formation of different linguistic territorial regimes are ethnic composition of regional autonomy (ethnic fractionalization and the share of different ethnic groups in the population) and “the power” of autonomy, i.e. the range of policies for which a regional government is responsible.

The next comparative research has been devoted to institutional arrangements in both ethnic regional autonomies and their mother states from the view of representation of titular ethnic groups in national and regional legislatures and governments. It has been argued that a balance in interethnic relations depends on the existence of some institutions, which facilitate to reduce uncertainty in relations between ethnic regional autonomies and central authorities, to provide credible commitments in their communication. Creating the necessary degree of confidence, they allow the actors to maintain an effective dialogue, coordinate and reconcile the divergent preferences, to resolve disputed issues by conventional means, in the framework of institutionalized ways of interaction. Among these institutions are federalism and upper house of parliament with special representation of the regions. Concerning the model of governmental power-sharing, i. e. participation of ethnic segments in the government, it has been found that this model has a positive impact on the effectiveness of ethnic regional autonomies only if it is based on fairly strong institutional arrangements, whereas situational post-electoral coalitions between ethno-regional and national political parties, on the contrary, increase the likelihood of conflict. In general, it can be concluded that the various mechanisms of representation of ethnic groups in legislatures and governments complement each other, creating a cumulative effect.

Political representation of ethnic groups in the activity of political parties, which is another important mechanism of maintaining a balance in interethnic relations, can be achieved differently. Comparative study of ethnic regional autonomies allowed concluding that the most common way is a formation of ethno-regional parties. Unlike “national parties”, electoral activity of ethno-regional parties is limited to the territory of a respective ethnic regional autonomy. It has been found that the “strength” of ethno-regional parties varies to a great extent across ethnic regional autonomies of the world. Although it depends on the level of interethnic conflicts (conflicts in autonomies influence on the ‘strength’ of ethno-regional parties positively) there are no the opposite correlation. In other words, ethno-regional parties do not generate conflicts though they do not reduce a probability of these conflicts. The second way of representation of ethnic groups in the activity of political parties, which it is achieved though “national parties”, is used in approximately one third of the countries with ethnic regional autonomies (including Russia), where ethno-regional parties are absent for one or another reason. The study of this way, which was based on the empirical data of the 2016 State Duma elections (parties’ lists of candidates), discovered a great variation: while some parties (first of all, United Russia) informally take into account ethnicity in the composition of their lists of candidates, other parties ignore it.

As a result of in-depth comparative study, the taxonomy of mechanisms of actors’ interaction and coordination in ethnic regional autonomies has been developed. “Primary” mechanisms are

used to establish, maintain and fix the principal arrangements and rules (including the recognition of a specific ethnic group as such, the establishment of autonomy itself, the formulation of preferential policies as a whole and in specific areas). “Primary” mechanisms include: 1) basic political institutional mechanisms (legislatures and governments), 2) judicial supervision and arbitration, 3) intervention of outside / international actors (kin-states, supranational courts, etc.). “Secondary” mechanisms are used for implementation and specification of already established principal arrangements and rules. They include joint committees and special bodies for the development, advisory and consultative bodies with the participation of ethnic groups, etc.

As a result of the project implementation in 2016, 19 articles have been prepared for the publication. 11 of these have been published or will be published to the end of 2016, including 3 – in the Web of Science / Scopus journals. 8 articles have been submitted for the publications, including 5 – in the Web of Science / Scopus journals. The project results have been presented in 15 papers on 10 academic conferences. The main information about the project is accessible on the website of the project (http://identityworld.ru/index/atlas_era/0-4).