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Regional Policy as a Significant Element of Ensuring the National Security of the Russian Federation

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Abstract. Regional policy is a significant element of the domestic politics of a unitary state, and for a federal state it is a zone of increased attention. Russia is an asymmetric ethno-confessional democratic federation, therefore, there is a constant competition between centrifugal and centripetal trends. To ensure the integrity of the state, the leadership of the Russian Federation (RF) has to constantly transform regional policy, based on the peculiarities of the socio-economic and political situation. In the arsenal of this policy, there is a diverse arsenal of means and methods of countering separatism and extremism, which was used throughout the post-Soviet period of Russia's history. Within the first decade, the regional policy of the country's leadership was unsuccessful and ineffective, which actually led to a civil war and the beginning of the country's collapse. Since 2001, as a result of the application of radical and unpopular measures and the reform of socio-economic relations, the situation has been reversed, and then normalized. This became possible as a result of the restriction of democratic principles and the strengthening of authoritarian elements of regional politics, as well as the preservation of the archaic asymmetric structure of the federation.

Keywords: Russian Federation, political system, Russian model of federalism, Presidents B. N. Yeltsin and V. V. Putin, ethnoconfessional threats, governor's institution, national security, centralism, imperative model.

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Научная статья

Региональная политика как значимый элемент обеспечения национальной безопасности Российской Федерации

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Аннотация. Региональная политика является значимым элементом внутренней политики унитарного государства, а для федеративного – это зона повышенного внимания. Россия – это асимметричная этноконфессиональная демократическая федерация, поэтому в ней постоянно ведется

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конкуренция центробежных и центростремительных тенденций. Для обеспечения целостности государства руководству Российской Федерации приходится постоянно трансформировать региональную политику, исходя из особенностей социально-экономической и политической ситуации. В арсенале данной политики имеется разнообразный набор средств и методов противодействия сепаратизму и экстремизму, который использовался весь постсоветский период истории России. В рамках первого десятилетия региональная политика руководства страны была неудачной и неэффективной, что фактически привело к гражданской войне и началу распада страны. Начиная с 2001 г. в результате применения радикальных и непопулярных мер и реформирования социально-экономических отношений ситуацию удалось переломить, а затем и нормализовать. Это стало возможно благодаря ограничению демократических принципов и усилению авторитарных элементов региональной политики, а также сохранению архаичной асимметричной структуры федерации.

Ключевые слова: Российская Федерация, политическая система, российская модель федерализма, президенты Б. Н. Ельцин и В. В. Путин, этноконфессиональные угрозы, институт губернатора, национальная безопасность, централизм, императивная модель.

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Introduction

In the late 1980s – early 1990s, the USSR, the largest federal state on the planet at that time, broke up into its main parts, the so-called union republics, without any external force. Among the reasons that led to the catastrophe, a significant place belongs to regional politics, which was based on a common ideology and the main political subject – the Communist Party. In the Soviet model, federalism was embodied to the limit – to the republics' right to the self-determination, up to secession. In accordance with the essence of the political process, any established norm is implemented. The collapse of the great power took place quietly and apparently without visual casualties and disasters. For example, there was no such rule in the Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR), and no matter how hard Chechnya tried, Russia did not allow it to secede.

In 2021, the post-Soviet Russian Federation (RF) will turn 30 years old – this is the age of the political generation, a period sufficient for political analysis. The functioning of the state is the most complex social process known to humankind, which includes many institutions, connections and circumstances. Taking into account the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is advisable to consider the restoration, development and current state of the national regional policy (NRP) of Russia.

An unbiased researcher understands that a competent and effective regional policy is a prerequisite for the existence of the nation. For a federal state, this situation is particularly relevant, since the problem of interaction between the Center and the regions can be fatal for it. For the Russian Federation, in search of its place in the global top countries, and looking for its model of ideological and socio-economic development, correct regional policy is a factor in the successful solution of the tasks.

The regional level occupies an intermediate position between federal and district levels. Relations between the Center and the Russian regions are largely reduced to the interaction between the elites of these levels with a low role of society [15, p. 14].

Therefore, in Russia, the regional level of power is distinguished and considered to be as an independent subject of the political process [5, p. 140].

Regional policy is a significant element of the national and political systems, determined by the country's model of the territorial-administrative structure, historical circumstances and political regime. National regional policy is a part of domestic policy, but it is frequently a significant factor in foreign policy as well. The authors distinguish the point of view that defines regional policy as a set of goals, tasks and actions of state (federal and regional) authorities and other actors aimed at preserving the integrity of the state and creating favorable conditions for ensuring spatial political and socio-economic balance and development of the country and the region [1, p. 14].

National Regional Policy in the Political System of the Russian Federation during the Period of Boris Yeltsin

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian President Boris Yeltsin was engaged in creating a new model of regional policy to prevent the collapse of Russia along the lines of autonomous republics, economically powerful regions or remote federation subjects. The situation was aggravated by the struggle for power between top political elite and competitors within the victorious camp. Therefore, the President offered to the heads of national entities to take as much sovereignty as they wanted, but only if they were part of Russia. This provoked a "parade of the sovereignties of the autonomous republics, but preserved the Federation"¹. At the same time, the attempt to secede from the Russian Federation was carried out by armed means. At the same time, Yeltsin tried to put under control the appointment of regional heads, delegating his supporters and henchmen there [15, p. 17].

As a result of Yeltsin's victory over his opponents, in 1993, taking into account the positions of national republics heads, the adopted text of the Constitution of Russia enshrined the principles of an asymmetric democratic treaty federation. The asymmetry was realized by economic status (donors, recipients) and political and legal status (republics, territories, regions, districts). This model was consolidated by the introduction of the Federation Council – the upper house of the Russian parliament including the heads of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Within the framework of the political system formed in the country, the principles of relations between the Center and the subject of the Federation were determined on a contractual basis and differed in the granted rights. At the same time, civil war continued in the country, unemployment increased, crime rampaged and corruption flourished. The population of the country begged for money, impoverished and emigrated.

In the 1990s Russia, there was a hopeless situation (when the policy of de-democratization of the country, the expansion and deepening of the democratic process, ensuring the development of federalism, increased the likelihood of the country's collapse. The subjects of the federation in their policy did not proceed from national interests, but from immediate benefits and their vision of solving problems. The regions, establishing direct ties with foreign nations, destroyed the unified linguistic, legal and economic space of the country. In the mid-1990s, there were more than

¹ Борис Ельцин: «Берите столько суверенитета, сколько сможете проглотить» // Ельцин-центр. 2015. URL: <https://yeltsin.ru/news/boris-elcin-berite-stolko-suverineteta-skolko-smozhete-proglotit/> (дата обращения: 03.09.2021).

70 cases of the growth of both ethnic and territorial separatism within Russia² (Separatism). It became a common practice to have contradictions between regional and federal legislations.

The subjects of the federation, primarily based on the ethnic principle, declared themselves sovereign and considered the options of seceding from Russia and coming under the jurisdiction of ethnically close states, printed their own banknotes³. Even more diverse was the political differentiation of regional regimes: authoritarian rule, hybrid regime, anarchy, pluralistic democracy [3, p. 83]. At the same time, horizontal ties among the regions began to develop actively, their cooperation was organized, and regional unions were formed (the "Siberian Agreement"), "Central Russia", "Big Volga", etc.⁴. "Yeltsin's" federalism essentially meant a systematic decentralization with a weak federal center and an unpopular president.

Regional Policy in the Framework of Putin's Political System

Vladimir Putin, who was elected president of Russia in 2000 and had the experience of a prime minister, understood that the country was going to disintegrate. Therefore, he began his activity by changing the direction of the national regional policy (NRP). For the success of this work, Putin focused on the end of the civil war-evidence of the failure of the NRP by his predecessors, while at the same time he began with the most important and sensitive –with the reallocation of financial flows towards the Center. The regions lost VAT and resource taxes, and the fiscal burden on the raw materials sector was shifted from taxes to export duties going to the federal budget⁵.

Then Putin removed the heads of regions from the Federation Council, downgrading their status from federal to regional and depriving them of parliamentary immunity⁶. After being re-elected for a second term, in September 2004 he initiated the cancellation of the direct elections of the heads of regions [8, p. 13]. To control the heads of the regions, Putin created seven Federal Districts, headed by his proxies – presidential plenipotentiaries. Under them, in 2005, councils were created, which included governors⁷.

Putin solved current problems, and began to create a different political system and a different model of the federation. The omnipotence of the heads of regions, fraught with separatism, was the main threat to the integrity of the country and a

² Сепаратизм в России и передача территорий иностранным государствам – забытый феномен «ельцинской эпохи» или все еще актуальная угроза? URL: <http://narpolit.com/istoriya-sovremennosti/separatizm-v-rossii-i-peredacha-territorij-inostrannym-gosudarstvam-zabytyj-fenomen-el-tsinskoj-epokhi-ili-vse-eshche-aktual-naya-ugroza> (дата обращения: 01.09.2021).

³ Дмитриев И. Два десятка президентов // Лента.ру. 2020. URL: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2020/10/05/sovereign/> (дата обращения: 09.09.2021).

⁴ Межрегиональные ассоциации экономического взаимодействия. URL: <http://www.politika.su/reg/regass.html> (дата обращения: 31.08.2021).

⁵ Зачем современной России нужны губернаторы // Восток Медиа : [сайт]. 14.05.2019. URL: <https://vostok-media.com/news/politics/14-05-2019/zachem-sovremennoy-rossii-nuzhny-gubernatory> (дата обращения: 01.09.2021).

⁶ Путин назвал правильной реформу в 2000 году, когда губернаторы перестали быть членами СФ // ТАСС. URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/9379917> (дата обращения: 01.09.2021).

⁷ О советах при полномочных представителях Президента Российской Федерации в федеральных округах : указ Президента РФ от 24 марта 2005 г. № 337. URL: <http://base.garant.ru/187995/> (дата обращения: 02.09.2021).

challenge for him personally. The model of the broad federalism began to be transformed into a model of the centralized federalism. To do this, he carried out work on building a vertical of power, which was completed only in 2020. The power vertical starts from the president and ends with the head of the settlement⁸. This political system was formed taking into account the Soviet experience. The Soviet state was not social, it was popular, according to this paradigm, the power of the state and the power of the people were united and permeated society from the top down, providing control and organization of life in accordance with the standards formulated by the state and the tasks solved.

Then the unity of the legal space of the country was restored, the norms justifying regional sovereignty, the supremacy of local legislation, and the right to suspend legal acts of the Russian Federation were removed from the constitutions and charters of the regions. In most republics, the company desovereignization ended in 2002-2003 [4, p. 178]. The supremacy of the Russian language was restored, and the name president (with the exception of Tatarstan) was replaced with the head of the republic. The institution of Central and regional treaties, as a vestige of democratic federalism, was abolished. Only vertical links were stimulated: the center-region, projects and implemented development programs are based on the principle of extraterritoriality.

The key element of the Russian regional policy is the institution of the governor-head of the region. Since the election of President Vladimir Putin for a second term, governors began to be appointed in 2004, and could be removed from office. Since 2012, direct election of governors has been restored, but the introduction of the acting governorates institute, which, taking into account the right of resignation of the governor, makes it possible to neutralize the choice of regional heads. A mechanism for intervening in the electoral process has been established and has been regularly used. The policy towards the heads of regions is based on the principle of their responsibility and loyalty to the Center, although managerial professionalism is also required. Often, the support of a candidate for governor is more important than regional support. The President has a system of feedback with the heads of regions, in particular, after removing them from the Federation Council, he introduced them to the State Council, which was recreated in 2000 for this purpose. In accordance with the amendments to the constitution (2020), the State Council became a constitutional body, which formally again raised the status of governors to federal. The analysis of the policy of the leadership of the Russian Federation on the formation of the institution of the governor in the country shows that for all 30 years of the post-Soviet period, it was constantly in the field of view of the presidents. The authors distinguish at least ten stages of its formation, development and subsequent transformations.

The party system was also reconstructed, and the creation of ethnic, religious and regional parties-potential sources of separatism – was prohibited. The role of parliamentary parties that received the right to approve the candidacy of the governor during the cancellation of direct elections of the heads of regions was increased. There was a federalization of the parties. At present, it is organized according to three

⁸ Путин объяснил необходимость для РФ сильной президентской вертикали // «РЕН ТВ». URL: <https://ren.tv/news/v-rossii/671076-putin-obiasnil-neobkhhodimost-dlia-rf-silnoi-prezidentskoi-vertikali> (дата обращения: 01.09.2021).

levels: the main party (the party of power), parliamentary parties and parties of regional representation. There was the formation of the institution of the party of power, which cements the political space of the country, providing a vertical of political power. This is not a repetition of the Soviet past, where the CPSU (Communist Party) was a party-state, and United Russia is an instrument of the ruling regime. Opposition parliamentary parties at the federal level are assigned the role of statisticians. At the same time, the presence of a multi-party system allows them to win at the regional level. With a radical change in the political situation, this will become possible at the federal level. The long-term logic of the development of the modern Russian political process is clearly directed in this direction. It is important that today there is not a single political party in the country that defends the principles of asymmetric federalism. Fundamentally, the Russian party system guarantees that separatists and radicals will not come to power.

Speaking about the tendency of strengthening of centralism or centralization of the Russian state from the point of view of federalism, it is necessary to take into account its contemporary peculiarity. Centralization is not so much in terms of a dichotomy between the Center and regions, as with the process of presidential centralism functions. This is evidenced by the right to veto the legislative functions of the Parliament and control over regional administrations [16, p. 24].

In order to organize effective monitoring of the socio-economic situation in the regions, the practice of regular reporting of governors to the country's leadership was introduced. The criteria for such an assessment were prepared by a working group of the State Council in 2006, and in June 2007, the procedure for assessment and a set of criteria were introduced by a presidential decree. In the summer of 2008, the Ministry of Regional Development developed a Concept for Improving Regional Policy, detailing the types of responsibilities of the heads of subjects [15, p. 26]. In December 2018, V. V. Putin approved a new list of its criteria, reducing the number of indicators from 24 to 15⁹. The most important criterion for the work of governors is the level of public support for the federal government.

The construction of the vertical of power was carried out at the expense of regional and district legislatures, while strengthening the positions of the executive power. The control over the representative power was secured by a gradual transition from the model of electing heads of municipalities to the model of their appointment [4, c. 181]. The majority of the Russian population lives in cities, which determines the role of local self-government bodies (LSGs), which are not formally part of the system of state authorities, but are actually local authorities. Therefore, the position of the head of the municipality is the main one from the point of view of population management. It is natural that control over this position is the main object of political struggle. In 1995-2003, the head of local self-government was elected only as a result of direct elections. In October 2003, the Federal Law was adopted "About the general principles of the organization of local self-government in the Russian Federation"¹⁰

⁹ Городецкая Н. Губернаторы получают новые оценки // Коммерсантъ. 2018. 19 дек., № 235. С. 3.

¹⁰ Об общих принципах организации местного самоуправления в Российской Федерации : федер. закон от 6 окт. 2003 г. № 131-ФЗ. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/20035> (дата обращения: 01.09.2021).

according to which the mayor could be elected not only by citizens, but also by deputies of the representative body of the local self-government. Its functions were divided between the two posts – head of administration (city-manager) and the mayor. In connection with this decision, the municipalities refuse to directly elect their heads. This is especially true in regional capitals. Today, only in nine regional centers, the heads of municipalities are directly elected¹¹. As a result of these transformations, the mayor was subordinated to the regional executive power. The head of the town or district, elected not by the people, and their representatives, ceases to be a political figure, and becomes an employee appointed special on the basis of a compromise between district and regional elites based on the opinions of a governor and the ruling party. This mechanism makes it possible to control and prevent mass extremist demonstrations and populist separatist propaganda.

A separate storyline in the activities aimed at improving the country's manageability and bringing the levels of economic development of the regions closer together is the consolidation of the regions. As a result of the federalization of the 1990s, the former autonomous national districts received the status of a federal subject, increasing the number of subsidized regions. As a legacy of the Soviet national policy, most of them could not organize the social and economic security of their population and the development of the territory without the help of the Center and the territories and regions of which they were previously part. Since 2003, the consolidation of the regions has begun, primarily aimed at uniting the autonomous districts with the territories and regions. As a result, from 2003 to 2008, the number of federal subjects decreased from 89 to 83 [4, p. 178]. The process is economically and administratively correct, was stopped due to the fierce opposition of the heads of national republics, did not receive widespread development and is now evaluated by researchers not unambiguously. According to the authors, the reduction in the number of subjects of the federation organized by ethnicity (titular region) is a factor in strengthening the national security of Russia. The inclusion of autonomous ethnic entities within the Russian regions, as a rule, provides their inhabitants with a higher standard of living and democratization of social relations, and at the same time reduces the level of possible separatism. Whatever it is, the existing administrative-territorial form of regionalization of Russia is not productive. The stability of the federal system requires the creation of a balance.

One of the most important problems that reduce the level of national security of the nation is the economic inequality of the regions and the interregional differentiation of indicators of the standard of living. This problem is relevant not only for federations, but also for unitary states, but it is doubly important for the Russian Federation. Russia currently occupies one of the first places in the ranking of regional inequality within the state among the countries of Asia and Europe¹². The result is an outflow of the population from poor regions. Taking into account the disproportion

¹¹ Горяченко Е. Е., Малов В. В. Мониторинг социально-экономической ситуации в муниципальных образованиях России (результаты опроса руководителей муниципальных образований, апрель-май 2016 г.) : аналитическая записка // Социологическая лаборатория АСДГ. URL: http://www.asdg.ru/about/struct/sobr/XXXIII/Monitoring_2016.pdf (дата обращения: 01.09.2021).

¹² Россия опередила Китай, Индию и Бразилию в неравенстве регионов. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/26/09/2018/5baa58cd9a7947f649eea8fa> (дата обращения: 01.09.2021).

of the country's area and population, the length of the state border, the proximity to unfriendly states, the depopulation of the eastern and northern territories, the sparseness of rural settlements are extremely dangerous. The country's leadership and public have always understood this. The equalization of socio-economic development and the level of well-being was carried out for most of the Soviet period, but, as in most countries of the world, this activity did not bring any fundamental success.

The current system of relations between the Center and the regions does not correspond to the principles of democratic fiscal federalism. Most of the income is withdrawn from the regions through tax mechanisms, condemning most of them to deficit budgets that only allow them to serve the existing regional economy and eliminate the consequences of emergency circumstances. The government's tax policy deprives the vast majority of regions and territories of incentives for the development of production and the tax base. Through this, even self-sufficient regions turn into subsidized Centers. The implementation of large-scale projects requires the help of the Center, which leads to an increase in the debts of the regions to it. According to the Ministry of Finance, as of March 1, 2020, the size of the debt of the subjects is 359 574, 368 million rubles, which indicates an inefficient budget policy of the Russian state [6, p. 155].

In order to equalize the socio-economic state of the regions, the government applies more than 400 measures to support regional development, but the effectiveness of such measures is low [11, p. 11]. The transfer policy is closed and almost impossible to analyze. Its size, shape and types are determined by the Center and can be used as incentive measures, support and approval of the course conducted by the leadership of the region. On the other hand, the policy of transfer subsidies for regressive territories has led to the emergence of the phenomenon of dependency of the sponsored territories. The management and business of such regions have become accustomed to this situation, and do not take energetic measures to change this status, knowing that the Center will definitely help in a difficult situation [12, p. 103]. However, the population of these regions is not satisfied with this, and they leave (especially young people) for developing facilities, where it is easier to find work and a higher standard of living.

Along with the above measures, the Government of the Russian Federation is trying to solve the problems of uneven development through comprehensive large-scale programs. The next one, the Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025, was approved in February 2019. However, its declared focus on leveling inter-regional differences contradicts the other three strategic goals – the development of economic growth centers, promising economic specializations, and geostrategic territories [2, p. 77]. The reason for this is the limited financial capacity of the state. But, often, where these projects are implemented, serious problems arise. In the process of their implementation, the Government attracts equity participation from the regional budget and business. Regions, as a rule, do not reject such projects, although most often they do not consider them to be the most necessary for the territory. Regional businesses participate in the financing of these projects mainly “from under the stick (pressure)”, as they do not see any particular prospects from their implementation for their business. When forming the country's

development plans, the opinions of the regions are poorly taken into account, as a result, these objects, sold by the regions on loans, do not particularly contribute to the economic development of the region, but consume large amounts of money for their maintenance [9, p. 48]. The most obvious example is the construction of giant sports facilities for the Olympic Games and World Championships, which in most regions are subsequently not fully used, due to the discrepancy between their scale and the needs of regional life.

For the Russian Federation, the prospect of disintegration as a result of ethnic and confessional threats is quite likely, although today it is less real than in the 1990s [10, p. 42]. At the same time, Turkey's aggressive policy and rhetoric about the re-establishment of the Ottoman Empire (Great Turan) has supporters among the population of the Russian Federation. Islamic extremism, despite the fight against its activists, is still active not only in the Muslim regions of the country, but also at the expense of the many millions of labor migrants from Central Asia and the South Caucasus [13, p. 89]. At any moment, the threat from Iran and China may also become relevant.

Conclusion

The formation of the model of the Russian state regional policy is far from complete, it continues to develop both at the federal and regional levels. Its main task is to ensure the national security of the country. During the post-Soviet 30th anniversary, a lot has been done, not all decisions were correct, but in our world, where achieving the ideal is impossible, the presence of positive results is already a success.

Over the past 20 years, the model of an asymmetric democratic contractual federation in Russia has been replaced by the model of an imperative asymmetric democratic federation in order to counteract decentralization and separatism [7; 14, p. 28]. It is based on integration principles, but domestic and foreign policy are determined by the Center. This formalizes the principles of federalism and increases centralization, preventing the heads of the Federation's constituent entities from pursuing policies that are inconsistent with the Center.

Vladimir Putin's more than 20-year stay in power allowed him not only to create an original political system, but also to formulate an ideological concept that organizes it. At the same time, the modern political system of the Russian Federation is personalized for him, and cannot be transferred to another president without cataclysms. Therefore, in the period remaining until the election of a new leader of the country, the ruling class and society need to create transfer (adaptation) mechanisms that ensure a civilized transition of power to another ruling regime. It is essential that the new model include a regional policy that is equally effective in terms of countering centrifugal trends.

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