

SCTMG 2020**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the
Context of Modern Globalism»****ETHNIC FACTOR IN THE MODERN SOCIO-POLITICAL AND
SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF KALMYKIA**

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Abstract

The paper contains results of research conducted in Republic of Kalmykia like in other similar territories, the ethnic factor plays a significant role in public, political and socio-economic life. Chronologically, the paper covers analysis of events and processes through the 2018 focusing research attention on more recent symptoms, thus making the research more relevant from scientific, as well as applied point of view. The authors analyzed the situation on the materials from contemporary Kalmykia with the help of an effective scientific method, allowing them to identify a number of current risks and threats to economic security involving an ethnic component. They are primarily related to execution of the law on rehabilitation of repressed peoples; critical state of the Kalmyk language and other. The authors spot a generally positive trend in interethnic relations; Russian civic identity is ingrained into popular consciousness. It was established that there are grants for support of projects aimed at development of interethnic and interfaith cooperation. At the same time, it is noted that the ethnic factor is often insufficiently taken into account in the practice of political, governmental management and economic activity, leading to insufficiently objective evaluation of economic security and mistakes that may result in appearance of crises in the region. In order to prevent aggravation of the identified risks and ethnicity-related stresses, the authors have developed a set of recommendations for federal and regional authorities and non-governmental sector.

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1. Introduction

Interethnic relations in Russia, a multi-ethnic state, are still a current project despite all the predictions of specialist about globalization and decreasing significance of ethnicity.

Appearance of new socio-economic threats and development of destructive factors, crisis phenomena in polyethnic regions with complex ethnic and confessional composition is a complicated topic that brings together political, sociological, economic and other aspects of providing economic security, which is relevant from both scientific and applied point of view. A scientific approach is needed to search for new solutions of many problems, including fundamental and conceptual-methodological and numerous applied ones.

2. Problem Statement

On the one hand, studies of contemporary social, political and economic issues often underestimate the ethnic factor in its various forms of manifestation. On the other hand, this factor is too often not fully taken into account in the practice of political governance and economic activity. The former leads to deficit of objectivity in understanding the survey object, the latter leads to errors that may result in all kinds of anxiety and stress in the society. In this study that the authors conducted on the materials from contemporary Kalmykia, they are trying to overcome this contradiction by means of qualitative analysis of the situation with the help of effective scientific methodology, as well as to develop a set of recommendations to federal and regional authorities and non-governmental bodies on this foundation.

3. Research Questions

The subject of inquiry is existing risks and strains of ethnic nature pertaining to socio-political and socio-economic life of Kalmykia.

The Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation for the period of up to 2020 notes that “to prevent threats to national security it is necessary to ensure social stability, ethnic and confessional agreement” (RF President, 2009).

Evaluation and mechanisms of neutralizing regional crises and threats are considered in the works of Senchagov (2005), Oleynikov (2005) and others.

Senchagov (2005) and Oleynikov (2005) speak of necessity to “consider geopolitical features of a region, ethnic mentality of its population” when developing strategic directions for ensuring economic security, and of necessity to monitor situation in republics “with the aim of possible prevention of interethnic conflicts on socio-economic grounds”.

Studies of relations between the economic security and interethnic relations were conducted by scholars from North Caucasus Federal district (Medvedev, 2015) and others.

The contemporary discourse of scientific literature attests to a transformation of economic security conceptual system and appearance of new types of risks and threats. This fact explains a necessity of interdisciplinary approach to evaluation of threats to economic security, employing experience of

specialists in ethnic politics and ethnic sociology when assessing regional economic security of polyethnic regions – Tishkov (2018), Drobizheva (2016, 2019) and others.

Scholars in Kalmykia are involved into studying problems in research of interethnic relations and ethnic monitoring: Volgin (2017, 2018), Namrueva (2013, 2014) and others.

The nature of interethnic relations in Republic of Kalmykia has been studied by Namrueva (2014) and others by means of analyzing respondents' attitude to interethnic marriage. The attitude to interethnic marriages is generally positive, witnessing to a satisfactory state of interethnic relations in the republic. However, despite generally healthy "ethnic climate" in the Republic, there are situations where there still appears an undesirable aspect of interethnic relations, namely, tendency to closeness, isolation in one's ethnic group. It is necessary to constantly analyze which factors under contemporary conditions facilitate formation of socio-psychological barriers in interethnic interactions, complicating interethnic interactions.

Studies show no links between demographic issues, population migrations from the Republic to with interethnic relations or infringements of rights of non-native ethnicities. Ethnic monitoring data confirms a high level of tolerance among the Republic's population and link migrations of the population mainly to unfavorable economic situation in the region (Kurepina et al., 2019).

Thus, while there are some studies in the area of interethnic relations in the aspect of economic security provision, the topic of this research is still relevant and requires additional studies in the format of interdisciplinary approach.

Diversity of ethnic composition of polyethnic regions poses a question on necessity to take into considerations ethnopsychological, ethnocultural features and traditions of various peoples in order to timely identify and prevent threats to economic security.

4. Purpose of the Study

The paper is aimed at identification of current risks and strains with ethnic component in the socio-political and socio-economic practice of Republic of Kalmykia in the current context, as well as development of recommendations and proposals aimed at preventing aggravation of these risks and strains.

5. Research Methods

As the main method, the research employed the method of ethnological monitoring, understood as a constant and systematic observation of events, processes and situation in a polyethnic region, their assessment with considerations for the role of ethnic factor to determine current or potential hazard of socially and publically unfavorable development and possible preventive measures. One of the authors has extensive experience from having used this method in their scientific activity for many years (Volgin, 2017, 2018).

Additionally, the method of content analysis was used in a qualitative study of publications in newspapers published in Kalmykia at the republican and municipal (city of Elista) level, content of communiques on official sites of republican authorities, the most popular social networks on the region and other Internet sources pertaining to the topic of the study.

6. Findings

According to the Russian Census of 2010, there are two large ethnic groups in Kalmykia, Kalmyks at 57.4 % and Russians at 30.2 %. Other communities are significantly smaller, the largest of them is Dargins (Dargwa) at 2.7 %. In 2018, ethnopolitical situation in Kalmykia was generally stable, as it was in previous periods. Interethnic and interconfessional relations were mainly calm. There was no terrorism in the region. The region is not and never was a zone where ideas of ethnic and religious extremism gained wide traction. There were only separate single cases when citizens posted in social networks some materials later deemed extremist in court.

On behalf of federal and regional authorities there were positive assessments of implementation of the Strategy of State Ethnic Policy of the Russian Federation. The subprogram “Strengthening the unity of the Russian nation and ethnocultural development of peoples in Republic of Kalmykia” is active in the region, in addition to the plan of measures aimed at implementation of the centralized ethnic policy. A Concept of State Ethnic Policy of Kalmykia has been adopted. There is grant support to projects in development of interethnic and interconfessional cooperation, protection of cultural, linguistic and traditional diversity in Kalmykia, protection and maintenance of religious facilities. Other projects are also on the way. At the time then, according to WCIOM, a quarter of Russian population feel distrust or dislike for representatives of certain ethnicities, in Kalmykia there were only 5 % of such people. Only 4 % of respondents characterized interethnic interaction in the republic as conflicting. Surveys show that Russian civic identity is engrained in the consciousness of people.

At the same time, ethnic factor is visible in socio-political and socio-economic life. Let us consider some aspects, which, as we see it, are not of episodic, temporary nature, but are likely to be relevant in the long run and thus require relevant reaction on behalf of government and civic society for rectification of existing issues.

First, importance of the topic of deportation of Kalmyk people should be noted. The deportation of 1943 resulted in a loss of almost a half of Kalmyk population. 2018 marked 75 years from the beginning of this tragic period in the ethnic history of Kalmyks. Numerous memorial events were held throughout the republic. It was emphasized that grief and pain over victims of repressions and respect for the generation that survived the deportation shall transform into a larger creativeness in the republic. It was proposed to cultivate pride for people having survived the deportation. It has been noted that together with Kalmyks, Russian wives and widows went to Siberia, often to their death, and that such deeds are tantamount to heroism. Warm and grateful words were spoken about Siberian people who first met deported Kalmyks warily, but later helped as they could and saved many from hunger. Appreciation was expressed for installing memorials and remembrance of repression victims in a number of Siberian cities and villages. It was noted that youth shall know more about this tragic period. It was suggested that the current generation shall take care to introduce information about hard work of their ancestors into books and other publications covering history of places where deported people worked. Suggestions were made to reconnect current school-age children and grandchildren of deported to the schools where their ancestors learned in deportation and to reinstate Memory Trains, that went from Elista to Siberia several years ago.

At the same time, there were opinions voiced that the Russian law On Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples is not executed to its fullest and a wider program of complete rehabilitation of deported peoples shall be adopted. A specific issue was raised about returning liabilities of providing social support to rehabilitated persons and victims of repressions into the competence of federal Russian budget from the competence of subjects of the federation. The existing situation, when citizens previously repressed by the state get money not from the federal state, but from their previously liquidated and later reinstated republic is perceived as unfair. Meanwhile, there are new demands arising. Among them is the one to introduce into the Russian law a right of repressed citizens for compensation of moral harm.

Another aspect causing serious concern among the public, and not only Kalmyk one, is the crisis of functionality of the Kalmyk language. UNESCO confirmed that it considers it an endangered language. Russian language is used at official events of the head of the republic, at meetings of the People's Hural (legislative body of the republic), in the republican government. Some local specialists say that currently no more than three percent of Kalmyks are fluent in the language. The results of surveying Kalmyk youth have shown that the ethnic language is rarely used for communication. Russian is selected more often, as it provides more possibilities for self-determination in life, personal and professional growth, successful social mobility. Despite measures taken in the republic to preserve the Kalmyk language, the situation has not radically changed, experts say. The public is still divided in their view of its prospects. Some think that it is in danger of a complete extinction, while others stay optimistic and while acknowledging the entanglement of the situation think that it is amendable and requires a lot of work for improvement. Proposal of controversial amendments to the Law on Education in the Russian Duma caused agitation in the people, especially among ethnic Kalmyks. There were several addresses in support of the Kalmyk language. The final variant of the law where Native Language stayed a mandatory school subject, requiring only writing an application on behalf of the parents has somewhat improved the level of its public approval, but concern among the specialists and in Kalmyk community in general persists.

Another important cause of concerns in the society, especially its ethnically-Kalmyk part, which is largely Buddhist, is prohibition against a visit of Dalai Lama XIV. The central authorities reject proposals for such visitation, quoting unwillingness to complicate relations with China. Some people perceive this situation as an encroachment onto their constitutional rights, abuse of religious feelings of Buddhists and think that believers deserve meeting their spiritual leader and teacher. Other noted that while it would be great to see Dalai Lama on Kalmyk soil, the question is highly politicized and taking into account interests of the states requires arming oneself with patience. Still others argued that various other countries invite Dalai Lama without any consequences. Multiple addresses from Union of Buddhists of Kalmykia to federal authorities had no effect, which brings a certain discomfort into socio-political atmosphere in the republic.

Unemployment in Kalmykia stays among the highest, while earnings are among the lowest in the country. Looking for a job and decent pay, people leave the republic for more advantageous places: Moscow and Moscow oblast, Saint Petersburg, northern territories, as well as abroad. The public, especially its Kalmyk part, is concerned with the migration outflow. As of January 1, 2019, the population of the republic was 227.7 thousand people, which is 2.7 thousand less than in the previous year. Just like before, depopulation happened as a result of migration, 3.1 thousand people, which

overcame the natural increase typical of Kalmykia. A high degree of frustration with this process is illustrated by the fact that a part of Kalmyk population are currently of the opinion that the republic may be integrated into neighboring territories if the negative migration trend and depopulation continue.

It should be noted, that sometimes the ethnic factor is applied to various economic sectors. So, in a republic without its own power generation, the cost of electric energy is very high, which hurts everybody, from population to businesses that are having hard times competing with producers in other subjects of the Russian Federation. However, attempts of Kalmykia to be included with the regions having reduced charges have been to no avail. Against this background, there are talks of unfairness of the situation, as the energy sector was built on the bones and blood of Kalmyk people, usually meaning construction of Shirokovskaya Hydroelectric Plant in Perm krai by Kalmyk soldiers, who were transferred from the front to the NKVD camp. Many died there of unbearable conditions.

7. Conclusion

The conducted research allowed revealing a number of current risks and strains with the ethnic component in the socio-political and socio-economic life of Kalmykia. They are primarily related to execution of the law on rehabilitation of repressed peoples; crisis of Kalmyk language; obstacles to visitation from Dalai Lama; interactions with external companies using natural resources and hydrocarbons at the territory of the republic; depopulation of the republic due to active migration outflow, including that of ethnic Kalmyks due to persisting unemployment and low wages. Manifestations of the ethnic factor are usually related to Kalmyk people, but not exclusively. There are cases related to Russians and various ethnicities of Caucasus, however they are less common.

Federal authorities shall take into consideration the expectations of Kalmyk public that the burden of expenses to provide social protection of rehabilitated victims of repression shall be moved from the regional budget to the federal one; practical measures shall be considered aimed at solution of this issue.

Due to changes in the federal law on education in the part related to studying native languages, authorities, educational institutions and NGOs, specialist and activists concerned with problems of the Kalmyk language shall use the positive aspects of the current situation to the maximum, while minimizing negative consequences, including through initiatives aimed at improvement of the current legislation. They shall try to use opportunities provided by the Fund for Preservation and Studies of Native Languages of Peoples' of Russia.

Central authorities shall find a way to provide an entry visa for visiting Kalmykia to Buddhist spiritual leader Dalai Lama XIV without harm to Russian-Chinese relations. A longstanding resistance to the meeting with the spiritual teacher causes discontent in the republic and talks about inequality of Buddhists in comparison to believers of other traditional Russian religions.

Support of favorable interethnic and interconfessional relations will have a positive influence on the socio-political and economic life of Kalmykia.

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