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**ETHNIC POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS PROCESSES IN ALANIA
IN XX-XXI CENTURY**

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Abstract

The article deals with Ethnic political and ethnic religious processes in the Republic of North Ossetia -Alania that took place at the turn of the XX-XXI century. The study is relevant, because the need to study and analyse system management of culturally-complicated societies and their governance mechanisms was long overdue in the North Caucasus. System management in contrast to situation analysis makes it possible to determine and influence on systematic basis of regional crisis. In regional scientific discourse “the North Caucasus issue” contains several **interrelated** problems. These are problems of origin and history of inhabiting the North Caucasus societies; social, politic and juridical region identity; considering the region as cultural and historic integrity; and finally the problem of social crisis causes, ethnic and religious conflicts in the North Caucasus. The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania has a difficult multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of population. During the post-Soviet period the authorities of The Republic of North Ossetia -Alania managed to formulate interaction mechanisms between representatives of different ethnic and religious groups, directed at a minimisation of inter-ethnic and inter-religious confrontations. It is necessary to consider the current state of ethno-political and religious processes in the Republic of North Ossetia -Alania from the perspective of events, happened in the North Caucasus in late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, in the formation of current state national and cultural policy aimed to approve common civic identity – Russian Nation.

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1. Introduction

The North Caucasus (meaning national territorial republics of the North Caucasus in this particular case) – the most complicated region in terms of socio-political and socio-economic situation, governance and maintaining national security of Russian Federation. The reasons of permanent instability in the region are complex. They are raising competition in the struggle for federal transfers, “shutting down” under crisis condition; and growth of politically charged ethnicity (including intense activity of various social organizations); and inter-ethnic tensions; and “religious revival” specific patterns. The North Caucasus specificity, in particular – ethnic variability of population in a high degree – impacts upon all social and political life of the region.

2. Problem Statement

In regional scientific discourse “the North Caucasus issue” contains several interrelated problems. These are problems of origin and history of inhabiting the North Caucasus societies; social, politic and juridical region identity; considering the region as cultural and historic integrity; and finally, the problem of social crisis causes, ethnic and religious conflicts in the North Caucasus. Current study of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the North Caucasus characterised by major divergence of views on important issues of historic and cultural, politic and conflict theory analysis, and the existence of contradictory hypotheses on the conflict case. A large part of social studies of culturally-complicated societies of the North Caucasus covers certain historic, political or cultural events that is insufficient to systematic explanation of the whole available empirical evidence body on changes of various social life fields. Multidisciplinary approach implementation when examining historical, political, social and cultural processes within the North Caucasus, allows going beyond the local frame of “study scope”.

3. Research Questions

Ethno-political and ethno-religious processes in the Republic of The North Ossetia-Alania at the turn of the XX-XXI century analysis is the subject of this article.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to analyze situation and development trends of culturally-complicated societies (using the example of the Republic of The North Ossetia-Alania), and to examine the existing mechanisms and programs of these societies governance and solutions for conflict prevention and resolution.

5. Research Methods

To study the mechanisms of ethno-cultural area governance the integrated approach was used in this article. The basic element of this approach lays in implementation of culture lens and politic theory analysis principles. In terms of methodology, this approach was realized through using methods of scientific analysis: mass media content analysis and socio-economic statistics analysis.

6. Findings

Current state of ethno-political and ethno-demographic processes in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania should be considered through the prism of ethno-political and socio-economic events that took place in the North Caucasus at the turn of the XX c.

Ethno-political situation in The North Ossetia during the 1990s was defined by three core factors. The first external factor is the policy of Federal Centre, which tries to maintain the control over the North Caucasus and considered The North Ossetia as the outpost of Russian policy in the region. But yet there were no concrete federal goals in the North Caucasus and all the policy was boiling down to vague conversations about “stability” and “good-neighbourliness”. The uncertainty of Russian policy in the region encourages The North Ossetia elite and some local intellectuals to ethno-political statehood legitimization of Ossetia. This ambition determined the second factor, defined ethno-political situation in the Region in the last decade of the XXs century. And finally, the third factor, which largely influenced on ethno-political development strategies of the post-soviet The North Ossetia: the combination of two ethno-political conflicts (Ossete-Georgian and Ossete-Ingush).

The two last mentioned events will be addressed hereunder (establishing Ossetian statehood and ethnic and political conflicts), because in many respects they were the result of Russian North Caucasus policy in that period and the predetermined factors of this policy at the same time.

By the early 1990s in The North Ossetia, however, as in most North Caucasus republics, the factors, which contributed to formation and establishment of ethnic Ossetian statehood, have already existed. Firstly, the percentage of Russian population had markedly reduced in Republic’s total population. During the period between 1970 and 1989 years the percentage of Russian population reduced from 37 to 30 per cent of the whole population. At the same time the other nationalities growth had stopped, excluding Ossetian and Ingush (from 49 to 53 per cent and from 3 to 5 per cent respectively) (Tsutsiev, 2000). Secondly, during the 1960s and 1970s Ossetians were greatly involved in leading branches of the national economy what impacted on levelling off of representation index. In 1989 representation indexes of main ethnic groups (Ossetian and Russian) were: industry – 0.83 and 1.03 – respectively, agriculture – 1.33 and 0.52; trade and public catering – 1.24 and 0.49; health care – 1.24 and 0.66; science, high school – 0.85 and 1.016; leaders of enterprises and organizations – 1.18 and 0.84; government head executives – 1.30 and 0.75 (Dzadziev, 1993).

On the one hand, the above-mentioned representation indexes formation in the Republic reduced the demand of skilled workforce and specialists from “Russian” regions, on the other hand, resulted in competition on the labour market, especially in prestigious fields of employment.

Thirdly, Ossetian ethnic statehood project had very concrete authors (politicians, scientists and writers), who strived to create a common Ossetian language from dialects, common national culture and other similar ways of political and cultural mass consciousness (identity) development. At this point the main effort of humanitarian intellectuals fell on building of “Alanian” Ossetian identity, as the constant of cultural and ideological structuring of Ossetian society in the new post-Soviet reality. In fact, Alanian historical and ideological doctrine, apart from legitimizing accent of Ossetian statehood, implicitly assumed the idea of transformation Ossetian ethnos from “about themselves” to Ossetian nation “for themselves”.

However two ethno-political conflicts (Ossete-Georgian and Ossete-Ingush) complicated the political realization of this project by making the North Ossetia the only republic in the North Caucasus, “to which national-radical activism became an external danger, in two roles at the same time – as the enemy in the east and as temptation in the south” (Tsimbursky, 2001).

The North Ossetia was one of the first regions absorbed the large number of Ossetian migrants and refugees from Georgia and Southern Ossetia interior. By the end of 1990s more than 38.0 thousands of refugees and forced migrants stayed within the North Ossetia, the major part of them were from Georgia interior – 28.5 thousands of people or 75 % and about a thousand people (2.6%) were from Southern Ossetia. Moreover, by this time 49.1 thousands of people or 30 % of Ossetian population, who had been living in Georgia, officially became citizens of The North Ossetia (Dzadziev, 2003).

At the very same time the North Ossetia became the first Russian Federation state, where armed inter-ethnic conflict had occurred (Ossete-Ingush), which resulted in dozen of thousands Ingush forced migrants – 40 thousands of people (Dzadziev, 2004), who had left the republic during armed conflict, and internal Ossetian migrants – 1.4 thousands of people, who was directly in armed-clashed zones and had left the suburban area villages. The North Ossetia involvement in this conflict created new complicated ethnic and political dilemma for the republican authorities: radicalism in the south and conservatism in the east.

The South Ossetian conflict undermined newly established Georgian statehood and demanded from the North Ossetian authorities revolutionary movements. The First Ossetian Indigenous Congress was held in Vladikavkas in December 1991 and adopted a resolution which aimed: “to develop a program and mechanism of Ossetian rebuilding, to overcome the fragmentation and establish Single Sovereign State in voluntary and equitable alliance with Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and thereby realize Ossetian people’s right to self-determination (Bliev, 2006). Among the initiators of this resolution was the North Ossetian public movement “Adamon tsadis” (“People’s Union”), which played an important role in the North Ossetian socio-political life in early 1990s. Reunion of Northern and Southern parts of Ossetia was “the national priority”. Realization of this project would concentrate the energy of Ossetian people on assertion of ethnic sovereignty, and thereby on transformation Ossetian ethnos from “about themselves” to Ossetian nation “for themselves”.

But the relations between this South Ossetian revolutionary and the North Ossetian legitimacy of government authorities in the eastern part on the republic were extremely complicated. Radicalism in Ossete-Georgian conflict had promising goals for the North Ossetia, but in the Ossete-Ingush conflict was acted as outside hostile forces threatening the Ossetian integrity status. The threat of losing territorial integrity of the republic on the East, forced Ossetian nomenclatura to concentrate not on ethnic sovereignty, but on territorial sovereignty of the republic, which at that moment meant proto- or quasi- statehood. Territorial unity of the republic was framed as a civic solidarity – “multi-ethnic people of the North Ossetia”, which was regarded as unity with common fate. Relying on fundamental importance of the motive “Unity” political authorities of the North Ossetia tried to adopt community-citizenship and thus provide the republic security in the East. Moreover, heads of the North Ossetian government offered a perspective, characterized as the opportunity to affiliate the dominant ethnicity (Ossetian) interests with the interests of the republic as greater integrity.

Thus, on Ossetian area scale specific ethnic and political dualism had formed by the end of 1990s. It was based on a delicate balance between military forces in the north of the republic and radicalism in the south, and on a peculiar geopolitical interpretation of the relations between nation-citizenship and nation-ethnic group.

These are the issues and problems in ethnic and political area of the North Ossetia, as it was at the end of XX century, that defined the border lines of main ethnic and political processes in the Republic at the beginning of new XXI century.

The dynamic of ethnic and political processes in The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania at the beginning of XXI century was determined by federal center behavior, which meant that the new period of Russian policy in the North Caucasus began. Notoriously, federal government initiated legal and administrative reform focusing on strengthening the State hierarchy. One of the major strategy of strengthening the State hierarchy priority on the North Caucasus became the safeguarding the provisions of the Russian Federation Constitution and other federal laws in the field of federal establishment and federalism.

It is worth noting, that the prevailing in The North Ossetia in 1990s conflictological field, where Ossete-Georgian and Ossete-Ingush conflicts were dominants, demands the activation of Russian legal and political space in XXI century. Besides, the situation was worsening with the fact that range of terroristic acts were carried out on the republic territory during the post-Soviet period. 96 sabotage and terrorism acts were conducted in the North Ossetia only for the period from 1995 up 2005 (Koibaev & Kurbanov, 2010). The biggest terroristic attack involved the illegal hostage-taken in school No.1 in Beslan during 1 – 3 of September, 2004, and ended with the deaths of at least 334 people including 186 children. These events had been a tragedy not only for the North Ossetia, but for the entire country.

On 22 June 2000, the Parliament of the North Ossetia adopted the Constitutional law of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania “On the introduction of amendments and agenda to the Constitution of The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania”. It was suggested that about 60 amendments and agenda could be amended in the 1994 Constitution of the North Ossetia.

Throughout much of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s republican official authorities, while dealing with the issues of ethnic and social development of Republic population, have accented on remaining and enriching the ethnic cultures. National and cultural societies – Slavonic, Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Greek and etc. community associations – were created in the republic during this period and integrated into inter-ethnic republic movement “Our Ossetia”. In the second half of 2000s the movement “Our Ossetia” consolidated 29 national and cultural centers, currently the total members of the community associations belonging to this movement number is 5.5 thousands of people (Relevant issues..., 2007).

Since 2007 Government Decisions of the Republic of North Ossetia -Alania approving “Program of development and inter-ethnic relation harmonization in The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania” became annual and got fixed material and financial support. Thus, for example, the total amount of funding available for the “Program of development and inter-ethnic relation harmonization in The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania for 2011” was RUR 6 million from the republic budget fund.(Decision of the Government ..., 2010). These programs, apart from cultural ethnic group development issues, formulate goals, having slightly

different dimension not just cultural rebirth and ethnic group development, residing within the North Ossetia. Vectors of inter-ethnic cooperation were initiated as the priority of State's republican nationalities policy. They were directing on mainstreaming "national and cultural associations carrying out socially significant projects"; also the importance of the development and effective functioning of various civil society structures defined, the activity of such societies should be focused on encouraging of ethnic and social development of The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania population.

At the turn of the century religious issue had also appeared in The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. The North Ossetia considered as mainly Orthodox republic. In fact, various religious organizations are in action in the republic. In 2006 75 religious organizations were registered with the Ministry of Justice on the republican territory (Roshin, Dzeranov & Oleynikova, 2008). According to the data receiving from the Ministry Of Public and External Relations of The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, nowadays over 520 social organizations are registered on the republican territory, among them 84 are religious organizations (24 of Orthodox, 22 of Muslim, 8 of Evangelical Christian Baptists and others). The enrichment of the confessional space occurred basically due to new Muslim and Protestant associations' establishments.

Between 70 and 80 per cent of religious population of the North Ossetia are considered to be followers of Christianity. Mainly they are Orthodox: Russian, Georgian, Ukrainian, Greek, Ossetian (3/4 of Ossetian regards themselves as Christian) and members of other ethnic group. There are a major amount of Armenian Gregorians denominations, especially Armenians (and then Russian and Georgian) in the Republic. Protestant denominations are also represented in the republic.

Data on the Muslim population in The North Ossetia significantly varies. So for example, figures are given: 15%; 20%; 25; 30%; 40% (Emelyanova, 2003; Roshin, Dzeranov, & Oleynikova, 2004; Koibaev, & Kurbanov 2010; Dziraev, 2007) of the total population of the Republic. In our view, the most real numbers are – 200 thousands of Muslim followers, which are about 30% of the total population of the Republic (Dziraev, 2007). The Muslim majority of the republics are Sunni Islam believers. They are Ingush, people of Dagestan, Chechens, Tatars, Kabardinians, Ossetian (about 20-25% of their number) (Dzadzhev, 2006). Azerbaijani population confesses Shia Hazaras.

The variety of religion form professes by the republican population had always been typical for The North Ossetia. This phenomenon basis is the multi-ethnic composition of the republic population, but it must also be noted that confessional differences in the North Ossetia are also common to the ethnic group – Ossetian. There are both Islamic and Orthodox representatives. However it must be said, that for the Ossetian majority syncretism are common, which based on the greatest level of ancient beliefs intense intertwined with Christianity and Islam. Such various religious combinations within one ethnic group, when other ethnic groups confessing other religions are present, made the coexistence of Ossetian and other ethnic groups' representatives a peculiar social life phenomenon.

Until recently the republic were quite peaceful in religious relations terms, but conflict-provoking vectors of interfaith religious relation, in the ethno-confessional field of The North Ossetia, had become apparent over the last decade. They are, first of all, ambiguous activity of the Muslim Ummah in the North Ossetia, secondarily, desire of a certain Ossetian creative intelligentsia part establish an original pre-Christian (pre-Islamic) status of monotheism to traditional Ossetian beliefs.

Two Muslim structures depicting different sections of Islam – Spiritual Governance for Muslims of the North Ossetia (SGMNO) and Islamic cultural center (ICC) – were established in the North Ossetia in 1993. People, practicing conventional Muslim, it were mainly older people, rallied around Spiritual Governance for Muslims of the North Ossetia. Young and active Muslim followers created own radical organization, which was informally called “Jamaat” and officially – Islamic cultural center. Activities of those parallel bodies, initially, positioned as the Muslim people of the Republic inclusion to the religious basis.

Distortion of values and customs, typical for traditional societies, changed this situation at the beginning of XXI century. At this period a split within Muslim Ummah had almost occurred: young people who undertook religious studies at the Islamic universities of Egypt and Saudi Arabia began openly opposed to spiritual clerics of SGMNO. Among younger Muslim generation of the North Ossetia was formed a sizeable layer of radicals, calling themselves “Salafis” (“those who on the righteous path”), their main demand were the society clearing from the “heresy of unfaithful”. According to the information, provided by Emelyanova N., at the beginning of 2000’s an extremist Islamic organization “Al-Takfir wal-Hijra” (“Disbelief and outcome”) operated in the Republic. This organization was established in Egypt, its members in The North Ossetia acted in the strictest confidence (Emelyanova, 2003). Islamic cultural center became the stronghold of Islamic radical movements in the North Ossetia.

ICC representatives rejected the tenets of discreet Sufism movement. They believed that “true Islamic principal – Chalifate” should override in Caucuses (Nugaired, 2004). Over the short period of time ICC managed to recruit a great number of Islamic youth, and became a real opposition to SGMNO in the first half of 2000’s, During 2003 and 2004 the members of ICC succeeded in arrogation to itself the right on carrying out of religious worship in the Sunni mosque – the main republican Mosque.

This period government’s policy was oriented on the Russian Orthodox Church activity, which was governmental miscalculation, activated the disseminating extremist ideology in the Republic. Decent law enforcement agencies and governmental authorities of the Republic attention to the ICC activity was drown only after the tragic events in Beslan.

The first meeting of the head of the Republic and Islamic Community leaders was hold in July 2006, Mufties of the North Caucuses were presented too. Muslim clerics stated: “we want to bring the positions in fight against Wahhabism and terrorism, by cooperating with the republican authorities”. By the judgment of the Soviet District Court in Vladikavkaz in 2007 Islamic Cultural Center was liquidated, but in 2008 it had already been reactivated.

In the spring of 2010 the situation within Spiritual Governance for Muslims of The North Ossetia had been aggravated by the interview of Spiritual Governance for Muslims Mufti Ali-Haji Evteev given to a correspondent of News agency REGUM, where Muftis actually confessed his adherence to the positions of radical Islam. On the top of this scandal Evteev submitted his resignation, which was not accepted by The Spiritual Governance for Muslims of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. However, pressure from the North Ossetian authorities pushed Evteev’s resignation. In February, 2011, Spiritual Governance for Muslims of the North Ossetia was headed by Hadjimurat Gatsalov, whose spiritual beliefs correspond to tradition Islam positions.

Simultaneously with the ambiguous situation regarding Muslim Ummah activity, the discussion of traditional religion type and character began in the North Ossetia in 2000s. Thus, you can hear or read about Ossetian division on Christians, Muslim and traditionalists in a religious field (Shticov, 2008). Some Republic scientific elite representatives tried to confer on religious Ossetian syncretism a “maximum monotheism” status.

“Monotheistic social religion of Ossetian” project establishment was mainly determined by existential fears of a certain Ossetian society part, that Ossetian ethnos would extinct. It must be noted, the prospects for extinction of Ossetian ethnos during various migration and assimilative processes are the kind of modern Ossetian society national eschatology. This issue is being constantly discussed not only by academic and cultural elite, but also by any citizen. The most different social reality aspects appear to be interconnected in such eschatological narrative: far from ideal demographic reality, traditional depravity, Ossetian ethnos fragmentation and, finally, perspectives of loosing of Ossetian culture and, first of all, Ossetian language. In this situation certain part of Ossetian academic and cultural elite especially looks forward so called traditional or public religion. As project authors intended public religion were to create some sort of denominational, from our point of view, quazi-denominational base for all of Ossetians – Christian, Muslim, and even for atheists, who were supposed to participate in traditional rituals range and to implement the traditional ethnic standards set. In fact, the “reestablishment” of public religion is the attempt to form a new basis for Ossetian-wide identity on the one denominational platform.

7. Conclusion

In current context ideas of ethnic sovereignty, which were quite popular in 1990s, are sidelined and only occurs in such causes of tensions as ethnic identity mainstreaming and negative ethnic stereotypes growth. Sociocultural factors, which mediates and forms, especially within everyday life, patterns – “own”, “different”, “another” – assumes increasing significance. In ethnic culture of the North Ossetia, mainly Ossetian culture, stylistic acquires special significance, setting out ostentatious domestic behavior, providing emotional state for various stereotypical attitudes. In a contest of ineffective economic policy, constant terroristic attacks threat, permanent violations of law and morality common man gets an illusion of “salvation” in ethnicity and religion.

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