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#### NATIONAL INTERESTS AND SECURITY OF RUSSIA IN MIRROR OF NORTH CAUCASUS

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#### *Abstract*

Russia now faces the need to rethink its own historical as well as the international experience in building the national policies and inter-ethnic relations in order to develop a “soft” pragmatic regulation of inter-ethnic relations based on the flexible and diverse mechanisms capable of ensuring the formation of a common Russian common cultural and political space. The subject of the research is the ethnopolitical processes and the contradictions generated by them in the North Caucasus region at the present stage. The situation is further complicated by the fact that in the context of geopolitical and geocultural confrontation with the Western world, there are information and hybrid wars, the intensification of radical Islam and international terrorism, the increase in the scale of uncontrolled migration of the population, as well as diverse economic and financial pressure from outside. The country now finds itself as a multiethnic and multicultural Russia, inter-ethnic relations within the country, their state and development trends are becoming a key issue of national security and guaranteeing historical perspectives of the Russian Federation, which determines the apparent urgency of the problem. There is a need to address conflicts and problems of the North Caucasus not only on a regional and country scale, but also in a long-term global perspective. The fate of all of Russia and the fate of the peoples of the region are crucially dependent on their readiness or unwillingness to master the chances and overcome the dangers associated with the processes of globalization

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**Keywords:** North Caucasus, Kabardino-Balkaria, ethnopolitical processes and contradictions, ethnic identity, identity, interethnic relations.



## **1. Introduction**

In modern Russian Caucasian studies, there is a direction that distances itself from the dominant rhetoric about the uniqueness of the North Caucasus and the radical differences of its inhabitants from other Russians. On the contrary, despite the complexity and uniqueness of the situation, human behavior and social life in the region as a whole are based on the same basic laws and interests that are characteristic of the entire country, and in many respects for other societies and states. Scientists representing ethnic communities of the subjects of the North Caucasus emphasize the interests and rights of the peoples of the region in the sphere of preserving their ethnic identity, language and national cultural heritage. In all these cases, the idea that the source of problems, contradictions and conflicts in the region is its ethnocultural and confessional originality is present as an obvious or implicit premise (Borov & Kochesokov, 2011). As a result, an active and broad discussion of the state and prospects of the region's ethnopolitical development contains certain weaknesses, when every "real" political issue becomes clouded with a mythological loop, and reality itself acts, in essence, "in its reflection, already structured according to then the conceptual scheme." However, significant progress towards rational concepts that can not only explain the historical and contemporary processes in the North Caucasus, but also form the basis of social consensus on the effective ethno-political development in the region.

## **2. Problem Statement**

One of the factors hindering an adequate understanding and practical solution of the problems of the North Caucasus region is an overly generalized, undifferentiated view of it, which does not take into account the peculiarity of historical experience and the sociocultural "individuality" of a given people. Each of the stages of Russian modernization left its mark on the forms and scales of intraregional differentiation across all dimensions of the social life of the peoples of the North Caucasus. Under all circumstances, the weakening (or strengthening) of state power was a consequence of the fact that the values of the inner world, national consensus and preservation of the cultural identity of peoples were subordinated to some other goals, be it geopolitical or ideological (Kumykov, Reshetnikova, Shogenov, Shogenova, & Chemaev, 2017). In this regard, the ethnopolitical processes taking place in the North Caucasus require a new scientific understanding.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the research is the ethnopolitical processes and the contradictions generated by them in the North Caucasus region at the present stage.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

An analysis of national politics and interethnic relations suggests that ethnopolitical contradictions in the North Caucasus are the most complex, most potentially dangerous sources of interethnic, ethnopolitical conflicts. The goal set by the authors of the article is to identify the problems of national interests and the security of Russia in the mirror of the North Caucasian knot of ethno-political

contradictions. The study attempted to highlight the current problems of the ethnopolitical development of Kabardino-Balkaria, to identify the main trends in the functioning of ethnic identity.

## 5. Research Methods

The interdisciplinary nature of the research in the article dictates the need for a preliminary presentation of the general theoretical foundations that define the tools and focus on a constructive and critical analysis of the development of ethno-political processes in the North Caucasus. The applicability of the approaches to the specific object under study was determined taking into account the complex nature of the problem and the applied focus of the research. In the course of the study, general methodological tools of concreteness and comprehensiveness, unity of theory and practice, analytical and logical approaches were used. Sociological studies are based on the materials of the authors' own fieldwork, the results of author's sociological studies in 2018, and sociological studies included quantitative and qualitative research methods: a mass questionnaire survey, an expert survey method. Considerable attention was paid to qualitative research methods — media content analysis.

## 6. Findings

In relation to each of the peoples of the North Caucasus, one could say that the successive subject of their historical evolution, which at each phase of development can be described as a holistic and autonomous system that interacts with its historical environment, is a sociocultural subject (Borov & Muratova, 2011). Accordingly, the initial prerequisite for building a unified concept of the history of the peoples of the North Caucasus is a pronounced understanding of the nature of modern national and public needs and needs, defining a historical perspective for them and for all of Russia (Arukhov, 2003). Speaking about the modern specificity of the ethnopolitical development of the North Caucasus, it should be noted that national self-determination, previously carried out within the framework of Soviet autonomy, is associated with the state status of a self-determined ethnic group. From these two variants of an understanding of the state-political status of the North Caucasian peoples emerge. The situation is the same with ethnic subjectivity, which is implemented in two aspects. The first option is when the political self-determination of ethnic groups is carried out within the framework of an already existing national-state entity and consists in securing the status of state-forming subjects for them. In this version, the ruling elite of the national republics is interested in ethnopolitical stability. This is the model when, in the presence of such a status, a certain participation of each ethnic community in the formation of republican authorities is assumed and guaranteed as a prerequisite for maintaining the stability of the republican political system, as a factor in regulating inter-ethnic relations, since real reinforcement depends on personnel policy in the region or the weakening of the socio-economic, political and cultural position of the ethnic group. The second option is when ethnopolitical self-determination and the realization of ethnic subjectivity are associated with the idea of combining ethnic and state sovereignties. This option comes from the national movements of the region, acting under the slogan of building mono-ethnic statehood. Back in the 90s, the ideas of ethno-state isolation began to gain considerable popularity among some peoples of the region, which, in turn, led to certain changes in their mass consciousness (Tkhagapsoev & Chernous, 2013). It can

be clearly noted that this is connected with a heightened perception of one's own ethnic identity, as well as with increased dissatisfaction of ethnic groups with their position and status (Akkiev, 2002).

Today, such particularistic attitudes have received a new round in Kabardino-Balkaria, which has a complex ethnopolitical structure, although certain specific features are traced in the very nature of their distribution. The fact that for each of the ethnic groups, in direct proportion to the place it occupies in the socio-ethnic hierarchy, the most attractive model of government is proposed, which it is trying to impose.

Analysis of the results of sociological research on the problem of identity revealed the dominance of the following components constructed in the minds of the population of Kabardino-Balkaria: 70.4% define themselves as residents of Kabardino-Balkaria. The respondents' perception of the territorial integrity of the region shows that the common territory, as well as in many ways similar traditions and customs, have an integrative influence. In addition, a historical and cultural factor is important for the population of Kabardino-Balkaria. To identify the influence of the ethnic factor on the structure of social identification of all age groups of the population of Kabardino-Balkaria, ethnic subgroups of respondents were singled out from the whole array of respondents.

The empirical results of a study of the self-awareness of ethnic groups of the population show the following features: regional identity is in the top ten most common; A significant proportion of respondents choose a subregional identity (a resident of his city / village — 25.8%, a resident of the North Caucasus — 33.8%, a resident of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic — 61.6%). The peculiarities of regional identity are manifested in the fact that the meso-level of regional identity (Kabardino-Balkarian Republic) is most pronounced, to a lesser extent - the local level (proximity to the inhabitants of its settlement). According to experts, the necessary condition for the formation of regional identification is the correlation of the individual with a certain community, localized within the boundaries of a particular region. (Thagapsoev, 2012) The reasons for the appearance of these boundaries may be different, but the decisive reason for an individual's self-assignment to a given territorial community is the relatively stable sociocultural homogeneity of the identification characteristics of this region (Borov, 2008).

The ideological motives of the ethnopolitical mobilization of Balkarians, Kabardians, and other peoples were different. The course of ethnopolitical processes in Kabardino-Balkaria was influenced by a complex of interethnic contradictions that arose during the Soviet period, gradually accumulated and manifested in the 1990s. The basis of these contradictions is the violation of the parity of economic interests of different nations, as well as unequal access to power and sources of material resources, arising between different users of natural resources, managers, politicians who have certain ideas about development and applying different legal mechanisms, and institutional practices to achieve their goals (Keler, Gunia, Tenov, & Chechenov, 2017). According to some leaders of ethnic groups, the latter turned out to be especially important, as this ability to exert personal influence on the implementation of republican politics, or control certain spheres of economic life and is considered as a factor of social prestige and social well-being of the entire ethnic community.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that in the ethnic consciousness of Kabardians, the mobilizing idea, the idea of state self-determination, is based on the awareness of the division of the Adyg ethnic-linguistic community, which contributes to the formation of a deep layer of historical memory associated with the Caucasian War. The Caucasian war became the time of not only historical changes, but also transformations

of such states as ethnic mentality, national consciousness (Tekueva, Gugova, Nalchikova, & Konovalov, 2018). They regard state self-determination as a prerequisite for the further intra-Adyg consolidation, as an intermediate stage in the reconstruction process of reconstructing the full-fledged statehood of the Adyghe peoples. Kabardians, Circassians, Adygeians still feel united culturally. Therefore, the Kabardian and Circassian (Circassians) leaders are looking for other ways to unite. One of them is the International Circassian Association (ICA), which includes the Adyg Diaspora abroad outside Russia (Gateyev, 2006).

For the Balkars, the mobilizing idea is to overcome the consequences of deportation. However, the search for ways of uniting the Adyg peoples (Kabardians, Circassians, Adygei, Shapsugs, and others) is alarming for Turkic-speaking politicians, public and religious figures, as well as some scholars. So, Professor of the Karachay-Cherkess Institute of Technology Chomaev (1998) in the Karachay-Balkar World newspaper wrote: “Adygs want to compete with the Vainakhs and divide the North Caucasus into the eastern and western. What, then, remains to do in these conditions to us, the Turkic peoples of the North Caucasus, for example, Balkarians and Karachai? Unfortunately, nothing more than becoming a springboard for the global Turkic influence on the North Caucasus” (par. 4).

Therefore, at present, not only the “aggressiveness” of everyday ideas about the problems of the North Caucasus is growing. Worse, an ever-increasing and deep infiltration of ethnocentric, mythologized, over-politicized attitudes are occurring. Features of life in the region have developed their own unique way of life and psychology. It should be remembered that over the centuries, every nation has formed certain stereotypes about its neighbors. Objective conditions and subjective factors created a certain biosocial type of people who are constantly ready to fight for the interests of their people, for their authority and traditions. This is reflected in the inter-ethnic relations of the indigenous population of the North Caucasus (Thagapsova, 2006). An analysis of national politics and interethnic relations suggests that ethno-territorial contradictions in the North Caucasus are the most complex, potentially dangerous sources of interethnic, ethno-political conflicts. Another difficult and intricate problem, in our opinion, is that the concepts of “ethnic territory”, “original place of residence” of a given people are sometimes impossible to clearly define, especially in the Caucasus.

The development of ethnic, ethnopolitical contradictions in the CBD, its deployment is a struggle of two inseparable sides in a single whole, two opposite trends: change and preservation. This deployment takes place in the form of a wave, the character of which is determined by the confrontation of two or more peoples and at the same time their desire for coexistence. In relation to interethnic, ethnopolitical processes, such trends, in our opinion, are the preservation of the existing ethnopolitical reality in the North Caucasus or its change. Interethnic, ethno-political relations in the North Caucasus absorb external influence from national, political, religious, economic, demographic and other factors and are in constant change - fluctuations (lat. Fluctuatio - fluctuation).

Under the influence of some factor, it is possible that the fluctuation is strong enough for irreversible processes in the development of interethnic relations and the ethnopolitical system of the North Caucasus. In this case, the fluctuation can either qualitatively change, or even collapse altogether, move from structural order into chaos. Such a critical moment in political science received the name “bifurcation points” (Latin bifurcation - a split, division, branching of something). The further state of the evolving system at the “bifurcation point” is, as a rule, unpredictable. In such a complex ethnopolitical system as the

North Caucasus, any accidental impact can lead to its collapse and the emergence of a dissipative (lat. Dissipate - dissipate) structure (Gateev, 2006). This conclusion is confirmed by the complex, still unexplored, ethnic, ethno-political processes that took place in the 90s of the twentieth century and having continued today in Kabardino-Balkaria.

It is necessary to realize that in the conditions of transformation of Russian society, the level of ethnic self-awareness and intra-ethnic consolidation is growing, which, in turn, affect the ethno-political processes that took place in Kabardino-Balkaria as well, and unresolved and unsolvable socio-economic and political problems contribute to even more aggravation inter-ethnic contradictions. We cannot ignore the fact that the political system of the CBD has not yet found a final solution to any of the pressing problems of society that remain on the agenda for more than a quarter of a century. Giving an assessment of the effectiveness of the authorities in solving these problems, it is necessary to designate that it is related to such structural factors as the parameters of the socio-economic development and modernization of the CBD, the land issue associated with the activation of the Balkarian national movement, the "Circassian issue", which is a logical continuation of the Adyg national movement of the 1990s, but on a larger scale the Islamic question, which is currently at a stage of stagnation (although there are still risks for its repeated aggravation).

The roots of these problems appeared in the 1990s, in the early 2000s they were still in a latent state, but since 2005 the economic, ethno-political and religious situation has worsened. Based on the analysis of the media, against the background of the events in September 2018 in Kabardino-Balkaria, we can state: regional authorities do not always effectively use the political, legal, financial and economic, information resources at their disposal, as well as political scientists do not have the political will and political authority that would allow them to find a solution to these problems. Analysis of research materials allowed us to reveal how respondents quite critically assess the actions of republican authorities in order to preserve inter-ethnic harmony in the republic. The majority of young people surveyed (64.9%) rate them as ineffective (including over 80% of respondents from Zolskii, Chegemskii and Baksanskii districts), only 6.6% hold the opposite opinion, others find it difficult to answer (27.2%).

As evidenced by data from previous sociological polls, the majority of respondents' place responsibility for the escalation of tension in Kabardino-Balkaria on those political forces and organizations that make political capital by emphasizing intergroup differences and the exploitation of xenophobia. The process of manipulation goes through three stages, and one of the stages is the "moral legitimization of violence". In this case, specific program goals and practical steps outlined for the realization of the goal can be morally sanctioned by the prevailing public opinion in this environment, after which any actions of the national or religious movement, even if they are associated with inevitable unrest and bloodshed, will certainly be perceived as moral, justified, in the best interests of the nation or denomination (Apazheva, Uneshev, Zumakulov, & Mamsirov, 2015).

It is known that in the perception of citizens, the state appears not only as a factor that sets the social and political context of everyday life, but also as a force that provides objective prerequisites for human existence. Therefore, in a situation of possible threat from certain social subjects, citizens, as a rule, count on the protection of the state (Apazheva, Mamsirov, & Tsoloev, 2017). In this regard, in the present survey, the task was to investigate the views of the population of the CBD on whether the state (represented by

federal and regional structures) is able to counteract interethnic conflicts. For example, only 19% of adult citizens of the CBD surveyed in 2017 believed that the federal authorities had a clear program to neutralize radical and terrorist organizations in the North Caucasus. Every second adhered to the opposite opinion (50%) and 30% of respondents found it difficult to answer. According to a sociological survey conducted by the authors in the spring of 2018, the respondents' answers to the question: "Do you think the measures that the republican authorities are exercising to maintain interethnic and interfaith harmony in the republic are sufficient?" Are no less critical: 68.2% rate them as ineffective, only 5.4% hold the opposite opinion, the rest find it difficult to answer (26.4%). Moreover, the opinions of the young and the respondents of the older age groups almost coincide.

The detriment of underestimating the real ethnopolitical processes in the North Caucasus will require the federal center of radical transformations: "to infuse new energy into the economic, political, spiritual life of nations ..." (Shorova, 2018, p. 64) and work out ways and forms to resolve ethno-political and ethnic conflicts.

## 7. Conclusion

An analysis of the ethnopolitical situation in one of the republics of the North Caucasus provides a key for understanding the situation as a whole in the North Caucasus region. The collected and systematized materials make it possible to conclude that the course of the ethnopolitical processes that took place in Kabardino-Balkaria was affected by a complex of socio-economic and interethnic contradictions that originated during the years of Soviet power, which gradually accumulated and manifested in the 90s and have continued Today. The basis of these contradictions, it seems, lies deeper causes than the violation of the parity of economic interests of various nations, as well as unequal access to power and to sources of material resources. One of the reasons for today's inter-ethnic conflicts is territorial disputes, which have deep historical roots and have been aggravated by frequent administrative and territorial changes in the republics during the Soviet period.

Situational moments associated with the deterioration of the economic situation in the context of growing ethnic identity, lead to increased ethnic tensions and intensify ethnic mobilization processes. The motivational basis for the mobilization of an ethnic group is determined by the totality of unmet status motives, determined by the need for a positive ethnic identity and guaranteed security.

There are no separate solutions for economic, ethnopolitical and cultural problems - they are not just interconnected, but interdependent. It requires a long-term, targeted and consistent policy of integrated regional development. In essence, this is about creating the conditions necessary for the main social processes in the region to receive a centripetal and modernization orientation (Borov & Muratova, 2011).

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