Conflictual potential of Soviet Borders

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Abstract

The authors examine the conflictual potential of soviet borders, as well as their influence on the social processes on former USSR republics via the comparative approach, historical and ethnological methods. In result, in every national Republic during the ethnic revival proceeded the process of writing alternative history, which would reveal the Soviet period in the history and reappraise the pre-Soviet period. In conclusion, all former Soviet republics – now independent States - are in the period of post-Soviet history and under influence of the USSR history. Under certain conditions of ethnic mobilization, such conflicts can be running at any time.

Keywords: post-soviet, elites, borders, history, interethnic.

Probabilidades conflicitivas de las fronteras soviéticas

Resumen

Los autores examinan el potencial conflictivo de las fronteras soviéticas, así como su influencia en los procesos sociales en las antiguas repúblicas de la URSS a través del enfoque comparativo, los métodos históricos y etnológicos. Como resultado, en cada república nacional durante el renacimiento étnico se procedió al proceso de escribir una historia alternativa, que revelaría el período soviético en la historia y volvería a evaluar el período pre-soviético. En conclusión, todas las antiguas repúblicas soviéticas, ahora Estados independientes, se encuentran en el período de la historia postsoviética y bajo la influencia de la historia de la URSS. Bajo ciertas condiciones de

movilización étnica, tales conflictos pueden ejecutarse en cualquier momento.

Palabras clave: postsoviético, élites, fronteras, historia, interétnico.

1. INTRODUCTION

The USSR was the Union of republics where the titular population dominated, and of so-called autonomous republic within it (for example, first it has been the union of Ukrainian SSR (Ukraine), Byelorussian SSR (now Belarus), the Trans-Caucasian Federation and the Russian Federation).

Such division between the Republics has contained a so called "time bomb". The borders between the republics have not coincided with lines of demarcation of so-called compact residence of ethnic groups therefore, the USSR collapse caused such a situation that in the New Independent states formed the regions in which the majority of the population is different from the titular nation. Just on these territories have been the most urgent and aggressive conflicts: Nagorniy Karabakh, Fergana valley, Osh, etc.

The appearance of such conflicts was predictable and predetermined by existing national-territorial division. During the USSR period, there were no mono-ethnic republics and almost all the republics of the former USSR, including the Autonomous Republic within the Union, faced with the strong influence of ethno-nationalism (ZISSERMANBRODSKY, 2003; ZINOVIEV, 2013).

The many Soviet Republic has been the Association itself. They included the so-called Autonomous Republics: for example, Georgian SSR included the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic, Republic of Ajaria, Republic of South Ossetia; The Moldavian Soviet republic included Transnistria as a separate region and the Gagauzia; the Azerbaijan Soviet republic – Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous region and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic. Almost everywhere in the post-soviet area after the collapse of the USSR the conflicts appeared, some of them still to be «frozen» until present time (BOZYMBEKOVA & LEE, 2018; SUNY, 2012).

What is the reason why the national-administrative division was of that kind? We have to remember the situation when the USSR has been formed. The nation-building processes has been implementing as a contraposition to the administrative division of tsarist Russia with uezd and guberniya (county and province), but without ethnicity consideration (SADEGHI ET AL, 2017).

After the civil war in Russia in the 1920s has been created the Union of free republics based on the ideology of communism and Marxism-Leninism. The new republics were constituted and included other ethnic entities. The main binding moment was ideology. To have a common language was also very important; the common language became Russian. The Russian language had the great importance to education, the Russian language has been used in Army; all the officials had to know the Russian language – so the Russian language could open the social mobility lifts. Also, have been launched the

program of development of national languages and cultures in the national republics and its autonomies. At the same time, there was a creation of a shared history, highlighting the common successes and achievements. The whole country was built – both in ideological as well as geographical sense (FARMER, 1980; UMLAND & SHEKHOVTSOV 2013).

The administrative-territorial changes proceeded since the 1920s to the 1950s and ended with the transfer of the Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic in 1954.

2. METHODS

The research methodology is based on the comparative approach, historical and ethnological methods that allow to determine the stages and patterns of formation of the administrative borders and because of it the formation of interethnic relations in the former USSR area, to determine its features and specifics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is possible that such an administrative-territorial division provided a stronger connection between the neighboring republics – many people had relatives in the neighboring Republic, people of

different nationalities were the closest neighbors, created the families, etc. Such relations had to be to "cement" society.

It is possible that it was just a division on paper, on the map – because there was proceeded the process of building a new historical community of Soviet people, for which the national question had to be resolved and would not be really important. Everything was done in one united country and the territorial division was almost irrelevant.

In any case, our history has shown that it did not meet the expectations and ethnic connections appeared to be much stronger and much important than the relationships between people.

It must be accentuated that in the Soviet period there was a governmental program of support and development of national cultures and languages. Compulsory schooling, equal access to education, development of ethnic arts- unions in the national republics led to the institutionalization of the national culture. How paradoxical, but subsequently, exactly cultural, art workers and politicians led the nationalist movements in the republics. In fact – those who were created by the USSR have turned against it.

Almost everywhere, after the collapse of the USSR in all national republics the non-titular groups became the objects of discrimination, they have been expelled from their territory, even in cases when their families lived there for several generations.

The ideology of ethnic revival or the sovereignization does not leaves sufficient space for non-titular ethnic groups. The ethnic mobilization was widely used by local elites. The primary tool of ethnic mobilization was a language. If authorities connived, the conflicts were very cruel and aggressive (as in Nagorniy Karabach AO) (ZAYNULLIN, 2016).

Then refugees from conflict zones made entire migration flows, these groups of people walked away from areas of the conflict, with their unresolved conflicts and grievances. Settling in a new place, people have translated and have distributed the conflictual potential. Usually, the refugees came to Russia; they were not only ethnic Russians, but in general Russian speaking. They were people who have been forced to leave their homes, where often lived for generations, to avoid unemployment, lack of money, and often - from physical exterminating.

4. SUMMARY

The memory of the cruel past experience is transmitted to the next generation, which has got opinions about the ethnic group that forced them to leave their home.

It was common practice for refugees first to move themselves, and then help to come to other family members, to their relatives or to their countrymen, to come as close as possible - to the same city, same

village, same street, same house. People, often even of the same ethnicity as that of the titular ethnic group, were really different from their domestic habits; then by forming enclaves, would have to feel the irritation of local residents. The situation more complicated if refugees began to restore and maintain their usual household way that is different from the way of the local population. This was especially true of the migrant of other culture respect to local population groups (people from the Caucasus in Central Russia, for example) (KHAYRUTDINOV ET AL., 2017).

In the situation of ethnic revival and ethno-nationalism increasing was really interesting the behavior of elites – all conflicts were developing in similar scenarios, actively controlled by elites, but passing in the acute phase the conflict becomes difficult to handle and, in turn, requires a certain behavior from elites. There are used a different kind of historical evidence of how the titular group suffered from the non-titular group. Further, the conflict proceeds unpredictably (STOJAN & MIJIĆ, 2019).

Also, every ethno-national conflict has been managed by local national elites acting in their own interests and was disguised with discourse of national revival, of the economic interests of the titular nation.

The elites give a promises of socio-economic prosperity if the national will achieve the independence and sovereighnty. The history is rewritten with accent on the exclusive role of the titular group in the

history and how much the titular group has suffered by others. Further, there are conflicts between ethnic groups. Conflict often develops into acute phase and becomes impossible to manage. Later, the conflict requires a certain elite behavior to meet the expectations of the most radical groups (PENKOVTSEV & SHIBANOVA, 2015).

Almost every ethno-national conflict was manipulated by local national elites acting in their own interests and using the discourse of national revival for the economic interests of the titular nation. Elite has used the conflict to get access to resources and to divert attention from social problems, to shift the focus from socio-economic problems on the ethnic revival.

The ethnic history was mythologized, but was designed some ethnic discourse, in which the titular ethnic group was revealed to be an owner of the ancient culture, for whom the Golden age, for various reasons, remained in the past, but a return to which is possible only with the attainment of independence and sovereignty. This approach necessarily implied that non-titular ethnic groups living in the Republic became inconsistent with new approaches. The support and the existence of other cultures were perceived as a threat to the development of the culture of the titular nation.

First of all, the changes were related to official language – the official language became the language of the titular nation, however the Russian language – in most republics de facto former official language and the language of interethnic communication, lost its

status. There was a linguistic discrimination when non-titular groups had only limited access to authorities or did not have at all.

The insufficient knowledge of the official language had obstructed or stopped access to the channel of social mobility for non-titular groups and led to a sharp increase in the representation of ethno-national staff in the authorities. This immediately changed the interethnic relations – there occurred interethnic tension. For example, in Tatarstan in the 1990s, the Tatars occupied more than 70% of management positions in authorities. This naturally aroused the public dissatisfaction of other groups, especially Russians, because they are more than 40% of them in Tatarstan. The situation began to change only in the 2000s (NURULLINA, 2014; BELOGLASOV, 2015).

In the regions without many cruel conflicts, the tension was still to be – as for example, in Kazakhstan. For the period since 1991, the number of Russian-speaking in Kazakhstan is greatly reduced, especially in southern Kazakhstan. A large number of representatives of non-Kazakh ethnic groups were forced to move to the Russian regions.

In all of the national republics, the national idea was used to get and to retain power for example – Soviet elites (who was formed by USSR). In part of these republics those elites were quickly changed by nationalism-oriented radicalized elite - for example, Elchibey in Azerbaijan, Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, etc. The arising of those elites has immediately led to the aggravation of ethnic conflicts. The conflict

became the military clashes and led to military defeats (in the case of Azerbaijan – loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, in the case of Georgia – the loss of Abkhazia) (EFLOVA & ILIKOVA, 2013).

In results, the problem was not resolved; instead of it, the new republics have got the economic problems. The problem of nationalism only increased. Armed conflict is very expensive economically, and ethnically problem could even more acute. The aggressive nationalist policy has led to clashes, as well as to economic collapse. As a result, there was disintegration not only with other republics of the former USSR, but also the internal disintegration. Aggressive nationalism first could bring elites to power, but then caused economic problems and political bankruptcy of the new radical elite. In the end, the government again has been changed by more moderate elites, not leading such an aggressive policy.

In the republic of Central Asia – Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan – everywhere the elites supported the nationalistic discourse, but they could avoid the cruel aggressive armed conflicts between each other.

One of the attributes of ethnic revival was the expulsion of non-titular group and limitation of Russian language use (as fighting against Imperian Soviet past). Then began the process when the non-titular group was forced the leave the former-soviet republic – generally, it concerned the Russians and Russian-speaking. As results, many high-qualified specialists leaved

Without the Russian language they have lost the language of international communication – it was the Russian language. The neighboring republics communication has been temporarily reduced. The radio and TV in the national republics functioned mainly on language of titular groups, the same about the education in schools and universities. Further, the republics became more closed in itself, at the same time began the process of de-industrialization, return to traditional society and increasing of religious influence.

The process of deindustrialization was accompanying the ethnic revival process. The period of 1990-ies on the whole territory of the USSR was characterized by the disruption of economic ties, of the industrial recession, of rising unemployment. Many technical experts, mainly Russian-speaking, became unnecessary and unemployed, so they went to Russia, at the same time, de-industrialization was accelerating.

The possible reason why the Central Asian republics escaped the breaking all the relations with Russia and other former Soviet republics – the presence of such turbulent neighbor as Afghanistan; in this case, it is better to have good relations or at least neutral relations with other powerful neighbors.

So, in every national Republic during the ethnic revival proceeded the process of writing alternative history, which would reveal the Soviet period in the history and reappraise the pre-Soviet period. It is quite typical for nationalist discourse, a process of

mythologization and construction of their own history - according to the state order - with the confirmation of the antiquity of its statehood, with the presence of outstanding cultural, or religious figures and historical characters.

It is according to the classical concept of nationalism, if ethnic group need the basis to assert their independence. The role of elites is clear, it served as the driving force of conflict, and nationalism as it is. The question is the quickness and the force of ethnic mobilization and of the reaction of the titular group on this appeal. People, who have lived peacefully for years, suddenly begun ready to the strongest aggression against another group and each other.

Perhaps, the answer to this question is that proletarian internationalism was not truly immanent ideology; but the division for we - others is innate. Traditionally, people attribute to others some negative or neutral characteristics, and to we – mostly the positive. This fact is often used by the elite.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Within the boundaries of the national republics of the USSR initially, there was the potential for conflict that could not be successfully overcome within the framework of the USSR – the project of building a new historical community - the Soviet people. This conflict potential was used by Soviet – mostly communistic- elites for

coming to power and to get access to resources. Often the elite themselves are unable to manage nationalistic movements and then they are replaced with more aggressive personalities, who fail with the economic problems and after this can be replaced by more moderate leaders.

Once started, the mechanism of the ethnic revival and parade of sovereignties is difficult to control and then developing according to its own logic.

Since the USSR period, many conflicts, for the most part, were not resolved, but were and still be frozen. There have emerged some new conflicts (as Georgia, and North Ossetia and Abkhazia, as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, etc.) and some new points of ethnic tension. Under certain conditions, the tension escalates into a conflict. The increasing cultural differences with the growth of migration flows can give reasons for a new conflict.

The conflicts may arise between the former Soviet republics, as well as within them (including in Russia) and between different ethnic groups. The conflicts can have both economic and political reasons, but the conflictual potential of ethnicity is often used as a tool for the ethnic mobilization.

The potential for conflicts of post-Soviet borders has not been exhausted. All former Soviet republics – now independent States - are in the period of post-Soviet history and under influence of the USSR

history. Under certain conditions of ethnic mobilization, such conflicts can be running at any time.

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