

FORMING AN EFFECTIVE MECHANISM OF SOCIOPOLITICAL STABILITY IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

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At the current stage of Russia's development it is extremely important to create an effective mechanism of sociopolitical stability in the Southern Federal Okrug (SFO). The creation (drawing up) and continuous functioning of this mechanism is a necessary prerequisite for the sustainable economic development of the Russian South (and of all the territories that belong to it), as well as the country as a whole.

The federal government is becoming increasingly aware that new transportation projects can be only implemented in the Caspian region if military and political security both here and throughout the Northern Caucasus is ensured. In turn, the new transit systems in the Caspian are not only economically advantageous projects for Russia, but also an effective way to protect its geopolitical interests in the Caspian-Black Sea region.

Today Russia can only retain its position in the greater Caspian-Black Sea region by pooling its military and political resources and conducting an extensive regional socioeconomic policy in the

problematic territories of the SFO. Without this it will be impossible to achieve sociopolitical stability in the key regions of the Northern Caucasus, including attract sufficient investments, particularly foreign, and carry out large-scale transit projects there.¹

In addition, regional researchers are concerned that most of the population and public organizations in the SFO are absolutely loyal to the government and only a small minority is engaged in constructive opposition to the regional bureaucrats.²

The public organizations that have merged with the government are mainly engaged in justifying and legitimizing the existing social order with deliberate disregard of the current problems, such as the flagrant social injustice and corruption. Today, this state of society and public organizations in the SFO is arousing justified concern among many independent regional researchers, since social injustice and corruption will only lead to sociopolitical conflict in the future.

The current state of affairs in the SFO and its territories requires that the federal authorities and the public institutions (organizations) of the country and okrug assist in establishing a self-organized civil society capable of upholding public interests, forcing the government to reckon with them, and, in so doing, preventing the emergence of a sociopolitical conflict in the okrug.

According to member of the Russian Public Chamber M. Bazhaev, by putting a stop to the war in Chechnia, the federal center temporarily prevented the crisis and conflict in the Northern Caucasus from developing further but did not do everything to ensure that the old crises would never arise again or new ones develop.³ He believes that the reasons for the tragic events in the Northern Caucasus in the 1990s remain. They include the chronic backwardness of the national republics, the extremely low standard of living, mass unemployment, the unbalanced geographic and sectoral structure of the economy, and the unequal conditions and rates of development in different territories.

He believes that an essentially new situation in the Northern Caucasus can be created by solving these tasks that will prevent the region from backsliding into another sociopolitical crisis.⁴

According to the author of this article, the SFO as a socioeconomic system cannot be fully integrated into the single socioeconomic expanse of the Russian Federation until the above-mentioned problems are resolved.

They can be successfully overcome if the power and public structures in the okrug undergo qualitative modernization based on the experience of developed countries. These measures should primarily focus on raising the efficiency of state management in the SFO by incorporating all strata of society as fully as possible into forming the power structures and ensuring control over their activity. This task should be solved keeping in mind the specifics of local society since it differs greatly in the SFO from Russian society as a whole. There traditional institutions predominate that are characteristic of the patriarchal way of life. Today these institutions, along with public organizations, branches of political parties, and other democratic institutions, could, if properly used and if their activity remains transparent, become the foundation of a real civil society in the okrug.

The management system in all spheres of vital activity in the SFO can be modernized by minimizing such phenomena as clannishness and corruption, which are the main causes of sociopolitical instability in the okrug.

The federal center is becoming increasingly aware of the need to create a public control system over the activity of the power structures of all levels. According to M. Bazhaev, the activity of the Russian Public Chamber and of the regional public chambers and councils is aimed at creating

¹ See: IA Sotsinformbiuro, 20 July, 2005.

² See: O. Tsvetkov, "Vzaimodeistvie obshchestva i vlasti: protivorechivye otsenki i podkhody na slushaniikh v Pitagorske," *Kavkazskiy ekspert*, No. 9, 2007.

³ See: M. Bazhaev, "Mirotvorcheskaia strategii na Severnom Kavkaze," Report at the hearings of the Russian Public Chamber *Peace, Order, and Consent in the Northern Caucasus by Strengthening Civil Society*, Essentuki, 2006.

⁴ See: *Ibidem*.

a public control and public expertise system for monitoring the decisions adopted by the state power structures.⁵

At the current stage in the development of the Russian Federation, given the parallel development of globalization and regionalization of the world economy and the existing competition for the regions' (areas') investment attractiveness, active and independent activity of the above-mentioned institutions in different vectors would be extremely beneficial for the macro region as far as the interests of most of its population are concerned. In particular, these institutions could engage in the extremely important task of monitoring the situation in the okrug and evaluating the government's actions from the perspective of the interests of all society. The federal center should assist these institutions in every way possible since success in this respect, in the interests of the entire country, is one of the necessary prerequisites for Russia's more active integration into the world processes. In our opinion, in the conditions of the SFO, this is the only solution to the problems caused by the lack of correlation between the sociopolitical system of the territories and the demands of contemporary economic development and to ensuring a high standard of living, as well as full-fledged and mutually beneficial integration of these territories into Russia's united socioeconomic system and the world economy.

Today it must be understood at the federal level that Russia's stability, security, and integrity as a whole depend to a decisive extent on sociopolitical stability in the SFO and the rate and efficiency with which the urgent issues of developing the okrug's problematic territories are resolved.

According to Russian State Duma deputy S. Markedonov, today the Russian Caucasus can in no way be described as an oasis of peace, prosperity, and stability. He believes that many of the positive changes there are superficial since they are aimed at resolving tactical and often merely transitory problems.⁶ In his opinion, the main task of the federal center's current policy in the Northern Caucasus is to ensure a "demonstration of loyalty of the local elites (manifested by providing the necessary election results, as well as by public support of all the actions of the higher authorities). This loyalty is based not so much on state as on personal loyalty (personal union) of the local leaders and representatives of the federal elite. This kind of policy does not promote real integration of the North Caucasian territories into the national expanse (legal, sociocultural, and managerial). Loyalty itself is paid for by means of political privileges."⁷

V. Avksentiev also points to the low efficiency of state management as one of the conflict-prone factors in the territories of the Northern Caucasus.⁸ In his opinion, the state is not coping with its main function—ensuring citizen security. He considers alienation of the state from society in the Northern Caucasus a much more serious problem than even an ethnic split. He thinks other reasons for the sociopolitical instability there are the prolonged economic crisis, the high level of unemployment, and the shadow economy.

State Duma deputy N. Kondratenko believes that the Caucasus could become the detonator that will destroy Russia. He associates the negative processes going on in the region with the damaging political and economic strategy of the Russian authorities.⁹ He confirms this using the following example. In his opinion, even on the right-hand bank of the Kuban, which has the best land and climatic conditions in Russia, agriculture has been unprofitable for several years "due to the economic policy carried out in Russia."

Head of the Ethnicity and Nation-Building Program of the Carnegie Moscow Center A. Malashenko sees the reason for sociopolitical instability in the Northern Caucasus in the population's total

⁵ See: M. Bazhaev, op. cit.

⁶ S. Markedonov, "Dva Kavkaza—dve politiki," *Zolotoi Lev*, No. 137, 2007.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ See: Ia. Amelina, "Plan spaseniia Severnogo Kavkaza," *IA Rosbalt*, 2 April, 2005.

⁹ See: Ia. Amelina, op. cit.

lack of confidence in the local authorities. In his opinion, the Northern Caucasian republics should not be headed by “Moscow’s puppets, but by outstanding figures that enjoy prestige” and conduct an autonomous policy. They, like the president’s authorized representative in the SFO, believes A. Malashenko, should be given greater powers. The expert from the Carnegie Moscow Center is convinced that nothing will be gained without a triangle comprised of “local, enlightened, and responsible elites—society that understands them—an authorized representative who patronizes them.”

S. Tarasov also believes that the main threat of Russia’s fragmentation comes from the Caucasus.¹⁰ In his opinion, if the federal center does not begin acting in compliance with the slogan “The Homeland is in danger!” and continues to conduct its evolutionary policy, gradual reform of the region, it is doomed to remain in the background forever. S. Tarasov gives a discouraging diagnosis of the real sociopolitical situation in the Northern Caucasus: “On the whole, even the reforms of Dmitri Kozak, the president’s authorized representative in the SFO, were too late. The local narrow elite, which has degenerated into clans, has ultimately discredited itself. It destroyed the existing subtle system of checks and balances and has become alienated from society. So the center’s reliance on it is discrediting Russian policy in this region of the country even more. Moscow is now compelled to act as “Liberator from the tottering regime” here, demonstrate its desire to resolve the social and cultural problems on the basis of justice, and create equal opportunities for most of the population. Only then will success be possible.”

In the current conditions it is extremely important for Russia that the territories of the SFO achieve sustainable sociopolitical stability because of the following circumstances:

- today the Russian South has become a border territory after taking on the mission of an important regional and strategic center that represents and defends the country’s geopolitical position in the Eurasian vector of national-state interests of many countries;
- whereas during Soviet times the Russian South occupied a rather modest position among the main grain producers—Ukraine and Kazakhstan—today it has become the country’s main granary;
- after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian population’s dramatically reduced health resort resources were mainly represented by the health-improvement and balneal potential of the resorts of Caucasian Mineral Waters, the Black Sea coast, and the Azov and Caspian coasts, that is, of the Russian South;
- the SFO has the natural resources and competitive potential to offer alpine types of recreation at the world level.

Today many regional researchers are justifiably concerned about the social aspect of the situation in the SFO, which is consistently confirmed by the official statistics of recent years.

For example, according to V. Ovchinnikov, the Russian South with its rich natural climatic potential is still a subsidized territory with a high level of unemployment and low standard of living. He believes that the economic development strategy being carried out in the okrug is not helping to overcome the symptoms of marginalization in the region’s society.¹¹ In this respect, he suggests adjusting the conception and implementation of the federal development program of the Russian South.

M. Popov believes that the political and ethnoconfessional environment in the SFO makes it extremely difficult to ensure sociopolitical stability and law and order. He thinks that the unresolved socioeconomic problems there will continue to provide fertile ground for economic crime and polit-

¹⁰ See: *Rossiiskie vesti*, No. 37 (1792), 2006.

¹¹ See: V. Ovchinnikov, “Uroki i problemy realizatsii strategii razvitiia iuga Rossii,” available at [www.edu-zone.net].

ical extremism and separatism into which the broadest strata of the population will constantly be drawn.¹²

Some researchers of the sociopolitical system in the SFO think it necessary to provide the law enforcers working in the okrug with the systemized instruction they have not duly received so far from the existing educational institutions.¹³ In this respect, they believe it expedient to organize special courses in sociology, social psychology, history, ethnography, and so on at the higher educational institutions of the security structures, universities, the Academy of State Service, and the retraining and advanced training departments, which will make it possible for employees to add humanitarian subjects to their professional knowledge.

Indeed, in the SFO's conditions nurturing religious, ethnic, and social tolerance among the employees of the security structures is rather difficult and extremely urgent. And it is impossible to achieve this goal without providing law enforcers with special instruction based on tough professional screening and informational and psychological training through a continuous education system in which the humanistic idea and spiritual culture of the people living in the SFO predominate.

An equally difficult problem is forming a positive attitude in public opinion through the mass media and political and social institutions toward the law-enforcement agencies as structures capable of ensuring law and order, justice in a multi-ethnic environment, and equality of all citizens before the law regardless of their nationality, confession, or skin color.

Finding a successful solution to each of the above-mentioned tasks is very problematic at present and requires concentrating the efforts of the state structures on creating favorable conditions for training specialists capable of meeting their job requirements in a multi-ethnic environment.

The above analysis of the state and nature of the development of sociopolitical life in the SFO leads us to conclude that a mechanism must be created that will ensure sociopolitical stability in this federal okrug.

This mechanism should consist of the following:

1. A procedure that ensures that the heads of the SFO territories are elected by democratic means at general elections, enjoy high prestige among the population, are well-educated with the relevant practical work experience, and are responsible and independent.
2. Modernization of the management system in all spheres of the okrug's vital activity based on the experience of countries with developed federalism in order to minimize manifestations of clannishness, corruption, and bureaucracy.
3. A program to be implemented by the Russian government that ensures maximum legalization of economic activity in the territories of the SFO based on the experience of successful analogs in world practice. A mechanism for ensuring financial transparency of the use of funds allotted from the federal budget and maximum regional budget receipts by precisely determining and augmenting the okrug's own tax base.
4. A program to be drawn up and implemented by the Russian government for eliminating the checkpoints and police posts on federal highways and the administrative borders of the federation constituencies since they are not performing the tasks imposed on them and are hotbeds of corruption among police employees, thus having a negative effect on the sociopolitical stability in the SFO. Transportation control, including on federal highways, is to be carried out by mobile interservice teams consisting of employees of the interior ministry, FSS, tax structures, and customs service, who will carry out daily cross-checks on different routes.

¹² See: M. Popov, "Professionalnaia sotsializatsiia sotrudnikov pravookhranitelnykh organov v polietnicheskom okruzhenii," *Iuzhnorossiiskoe obozrenie*, No. 12, 2002.

¹³ See: *Ibidem*.

Removing the artificial barriers on the borders of the federation constituencies will not worsen but significantly improve the situation and greatly raise the population's confidence in the federal and regional authorities. In so doing, the number of State Road Traffic Safety Inspection employees will be reduced and inspectors will concentrate on monitoring road safety regulations with wider use of blind patrol work on highways and city streets.

5. A Russian governmental information and review center for the SFO responsible for elucidating Russian policy in the okrug. This center will help to create a cycle of TV and radio programs and publications in other mass media aimed at strengthening unity among the okrug's nationalities and raising the culture of ethnic communication, mutual tolerance among ethnic groups, cooperation, and mutual assistance among the nationalities living here.
6. Attention by the Russian government to the needs of the country's southern regions that belong to the regions with low and extremely low levels of socioeconomic development.
7. Consistent elimination by the Russian government of the barriers hindering the development of the resort and tourist business, expansion of the geographical location and diversity of tours in the territories of the SFO, and creation of a full-fledged federal sectoral structure for coordinating the functioning of the country's resort and tourist complex based on the experience of successful analogs in world practice.
8. Organization in the SFO's general educational schools, as the main institutions of socialization and personality development of the young generation, of efforts to raise the tolerance of the upcoming generation, develop positive ethnic relations, and consolidate the multinational people of the okrug around the idea of "the unity and indivisibility of democratic Russia."
9. Consistent implementation by the Russian president and government of a comprehensive and well-thought-out policy for demilitarizing the SFO in the interests of raising the okrug's investment appeal and encouraging more active integration of the okrug's territories into the national and global processes.
10. Revived mutually advantageous interstate relations with Georgia, expanded bilateral economic trade and cultural relations, and as efficient use as possible of the potential of the historically developed relations of the Russian constituencies bordering on Georgia.

When it transferred to market relations Russia became more open to active integration into the world economic system. In these circumstances, the country's South could become an advantageous platform in terms of world competition in different spheres of the economy.

So it can be concluded that today the SFO is Russia's military-strategic and geopolitical outpost, its granary, health resort, southern foreign trade center, and transport-gateway module for integrating the country via the Black and Mediterranean seas into the global system of transcontinental transportation arteries.

Consequently, ensuring sociopolitical stability in the territories of the SFO is not only a problem for the local authorities, but also a national problem since the degree to which the above-mentioned potential of these territories is used in the interests of both the local citizens and the country's population as a whole directly depends on the resolution of this problem.