

ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS: CONFLICT POTENTIAL

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Even though ethnic conflicts in Russia are localized while their nature is growing more specific they still remain one of the priorities and one of the typical features of Russian society today. At the same time, they are the least studied subject with no developed research methodology of its own. There is no agreement on the key concepts: an ethnic conflict and its derivatives (conflict potential and ethnic tension). This is not a purely academic problem: practical measures, behavior of the law enforcement bodies

and the media depend on how we interpret an ethnic conflict. This is why I deem it necessary to offer my interpretation of the key and related terms.

An ethnic conflict is one of the types of social confrontation in which at least one of the sides describes itself as an ethnic community. It was V. Tishkov who first offered this interpretation in Russian academic studies: "By ethnic conflict we mean organized political actions, public movements, mass unrest, separatist actions and even civil wars in which ethnic communities are involved."¹ This approach differs greatly from how the law enforcement structures in the Northern Caucasus (and, probably, across the country) identify ethnic conflicts: for them an ethnic conflict is a situation in which hostile actions were planned as ethnically oriented from the very beginning (that is, the object of hostile actions was selected because of its ethnic affiliation). In Britain and America such crimes are called "hate crimes." This approach cannot explain the mechanism of such conflicts: a fight at a local discotheque may develop into wide-scale ethnic pogroms. This approach has narrow forecasting potential and cannot reveal the conflicting level of ethnic relations (to say nothing of distorted crime-related statistics as a whole). I am convinced that to describe any clash as an ethnic conflict it should inflict measurable damage on the sides. In the absence of such damage one can only speak about various levels of ethnic tension.

By conflict potential I mean the possibility of an ethnic confrontation and its development in an area at any given period of time. This potential includes a fairly complex system of elements in which public consciousness phenomena rather than objective conditions (the economic development level, for example) play the key role. Conflict potential shows how fast ethnic tension is growing and how easily it can transform into hostilities. In fact, similar events produce different results on territories with different conflict potentials. An ability to assess this potential is the key to correct forecasting of possible conflicts.

Let us look at the Northern Caucasus as a territory that includes several republics within the Russian Federation: Adigey, Daghestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania, Chechnia, as well as the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories and the Rostov Region. The boundaries of the Northern Caucasus are determined not so much by close economic contacts within it as by its common past and the close social and cultural features of its peoples. I should say that the Rostov Region is the least North Caucasian among the other constituencies, as far as its social and cultural features are concerned, yet its capital, Rostov-on-Don, is the administrative center of the Southern Federal Okrug. This, and the Soviet tradition, makes the region part of the Northern Caucasus.

The Northern Caucasus figures daily in news reports—this confirms that the conflict situation there remains tense. The largest number of ethnic conflicts happens in the Northern Caucasus; their intensity and quantity in this area have made the region a pattern to be used when studying ethnic conflicts.

Common people know that the region's conflict potential is large, yet this opinion is not enough to analyze the situation, forecast future developments, and plan efficient remedies. Let us try to answer three main questions: How was this potential assessed? What are the main results of this assessment? How did they affect social practice, including that of the state authorities?

According E. Stepanov, a very respected researcher, "the methods for studying tensions and conflicts should be used to register conflict-prone manifestations at the conscious level and to identify the parameters of involvement in tense, or conflict, interactions. This presupposes: collection and analysis of conflict statistics; content analysis of media information; monitoring the conflicting sides' behavior; clarification of expert assessments of conflicts with the help of the focus-group method; conflictological processing of sociological information; secondary analysis of empirical information, and mapping conflicts."²

More often than not, to assess the region's conflict potential researchers turn to the time-tested method of mass sociological polling in the form of questionnaires or interviews; the greater part of such polls was limited to one federation constituency alone (one republic, territory or region). One of the exceptions was a wide-scale poll of 4,500 respondents conducted in 1995 by E. Kritskiy and his team (of which the

¹ V.A. Tishkov, "Etnicheskiy konflikt v kontekste obshchestvovedcheskikh teoriy," in: *Sotsial'nye konflikti: ekspertiza, prognozirovaniye, tekhnologii razresheniya*, Issue 2, Part 1, Moscow, 1992, pp. 30-31.

² E.I. Stepanov, "Upravlencheskie aspekty regional'noy konfliktologii v Rossii," *Konflikti na Severnom Kavkaze i puti ikh razresheniya*, Rostov-on-Don, 2003, p. 27.

present author was a member) in ten constituencies of the Russian Federation. It was organized with the help of the RF Ministry for Ethnic Affairs and Federation within the largest project called "The Chechen Crisis as Perceived by the North Caucasian Population." Conducted in the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia while hostilities were still raging in Chechnia, it became one of the best examples of "frontline sociology." Later studies use its methodology: because of this we can rationally assess social dynamics since 1995.

Mass polls produce vast bodies of empirical material that unfortunately lacks the depth needed for further study of the key trends. Some of the aspects of tension can hardly be translated into figures (for example, everything connected with motivation). This explains why in 2001 the Southern Regional Resource Center (SRRC) polled 1,000 respondents in four federation constituencies within the project "The South of Russia—a Region of Ethnic Harmony and Peace", the poll being complemented with a series of eight focus groups (in-depth collective interviews) in two cities. In Krasnodar the focus groups included leaders of ethnic public member-organizations of the National Cultures Center of Kuban; Slavic youth between 18 and 25; and Slavs and Armenians between 30 and 55. In Maikop the focus groups included Slavic women between the ages of 30 and 55, Slavic men and Adighe women of the same age, and a mixed group of Russian and Adighe youths. Combining the mass poll and the focus groups made it possible to study the conflict potential of a vast territory and obtain a better understanding of such important aspects of the conflict potential as the causes of concern and motivations of members of various ethnic and social communities.

Text analysis is another important method of conflict potential studies; the texts produced by the authorities and the media are the best source of such analysis. In 2002, the author of this article studied over 300 newspaper publications in the Krasnodar Territory on the ethnic relations and migration patterns that appeared between 1989 and 2002. My main conclusion is that the common approach of the local press increases negative stereotypes related to ethnic "aliens." In fact, lack of tolerance is a habit caused by many years of one-sided influence of the authorities rather than the journalists' personal views.³

Some of the researchers (I. Batykov and M. Savva among them) described human behavior in conflict situations using eyewitness accounts of the pogroms in the Severskaia District (Krasnodar Territory) in December 2002.⁴

The information on the relations between old-timers and ethnic minorities relatively recently driven to the region by the ethnic conflicts that flared up in the Soviet Union during the last years of its existence are especially important. The "new diasporas" and the radically minded locals demonstrate the highest conflict level; in the Northern Caucasus such "new diasporas" primarily include the Meskhetian Turks and the Kurds. In 2003, sociologists of the department of sociology at Kuban State University conducted a poll among the local Meskhetian Turks at the request of the Krasnodar Territory Administration. They polled the heads of 1,688 families (with 8,524 members) using specific polling methods.⁵

The size of the Armenian diaspora and its considerable influence on the social and economic situation in the region requires sporadic studies of various aspects of life of the North Caucasian Armenians.⁶

There were attempts at mapping ethnic conflicts. The *Liudi goda* (People of the Year) journal published in the Krasnodar Territory carried the first map of ethnic conflicts in 1989-2002 in issue No. 6 (11) for 2003.⁷ Ethnic mapping is going on in the Stavropol Territory, which is also developing a monitoring instrument of ethno-demographic and migration processes based on GIS (geographic information system) technologies.⁸

³ See: M.V. Savva, E.V. Savva, *Pressa, vlast i etniceskiy konflikt (vzaimosvaz na primere Krasnodarskogo kraia)*, Krasnodar, 2002, p. 77.

⁴ See: M. Savva, I. Batykov, "Proiavlennia ekstremizma," *Set etnologicheskogo monitoringa i rannego preduprezhdenia konfliktov. Bulletin*, No. 3, November-December 2003, p. 42.

⁵ See: V.N. Petrov, V.I. Okhrimenko, *Obshchina turok-meskhetintsev v Krasnodarskom krae: cherty sotsial'nogo portreta*, Krasnodar, 2003.

⁶ See: G.S. Denisova, "Armiaskaia migratsia na Iuge Rossii v zerkale obshchestvennogo mnienia," in: *Problemy migratsii na Iuge Rossii: opyt sotsiologicheskogo analiza*, Rostov-on-Don, 2003, pp. 35-49.

⁷ See: M. Savva, N. Blinova, "Zatiazhnaia bolezn kubanskikh konfliktov," *Liudi goda*, No. 6, 2003, pp. 52-54.

⁸ See: A.N. Panin, "GIS-monitoring etnodemograficheskikh i migratsionnykh protsessov (na primere Stavropol'skogo kraia)," in: *Problemy migratsii i opyt ee regulirovaniia v politicheskom Kavkazskom regione*, Moscow, Stavropol, 2003, pp. 194-196.

Such work will be better done if we apply several methods within the same project; regrettably, I do not know of any research programs carried out in the region that employed more than two or three methods of conflict potential analysis. In recent years there have been no studies on a regional scale that provide information for carrying out a comparative analysis of several North Caucasian constituencies of the RF. The reliability of mass sociological polls (especially in the areas with a high level of armed violence, such as Chechnia, Ingushetia and Daghestan) leaves much to be desired. We can say in general that the studies conducted in the region have not created a trustworthy basis for forecasting ethnic conflicts even in the short-term perspective. In my opinion, judging from ethnic-and-conflict mapping of the Krasnodar Territory, ethnic conflicts have recently been losing their scope: they involve fewer people and cover smaller territories. They remain fairly frequent and grow more unique where their causes and manifestations are concerned. This makes forecasting even harder and raises the question of applicability of the currently used methods. In other words, our instruments no longer suit the situation.

At the same time, the results of several years of studies suggest several conclusions concerning the factors behind the ethnic conflicts in the region.

A high level of ethnic diversity of the local population. It is hundreds of times higher than in Central Russia: the local index of ethnic diversity is no less than 0.3, compared with 0.003 in the central federation constituencies. This index shows how often members of different ethnic groups communicate. In the Northern Caucasus they live side by side, come into contact, and have to compete for jobs and resources. The high level of ethnic diversity does not mean that conflicts are inevitable, yet it creates objective prerequisites: indeed, there are no ethnic conflicts in monoethnic environments. Regrettably, the results of the latest population census have not yet been processed, therefore researchers cannot use the data defining the North Caucasian ethnic composition. As soon as they become available we shall be able to trace the dynamics of ethnic diversity for 1989-2002.

External migration to the South of Russia. A considerable part of those who migrated to Russia (both forced and economic migrants) selected the Stavropol and Krasnodar territories and the Rostov Region as places of settlement. We should say that the ethnic structure of the migration flow more or less corresponds to the local people's ethnic composition. According to information supplied by the Krasnodar Territorial Bureau of State Statistics, Russians account for 80.7 percent of those who settled in the territory in 2002; Armenians, 5.9 percent; Ukrainians, 5.8 percent; Tartars and Belorussians, 0.8 percent of each group.⁹ By 1 January, 2002, Russians accounted for 85 percent of the local population, and Armenians for 4.9 percent.¹⁰ If we take 1989 as the departure point we shall discover that it was migration that swelled the ranks of the previously small diasporas (which consisted of tens or, at least, hundreds of people). I have in mind the Meskhetian Turks and the Kurds. In the absence of a deliberate integration policy, considerable cultural and axiological distinctions and different accumulation and consumption patterns of the old-timers and newcomers cause tension. In some cases migrant diasporas become self-contained; they reject contacts outside their members and look at the old-timers as enemies. Normal interaction between the migrants and the local people becomes impossible; sudden (at first glance) violence becomes highly possible, thus lowering the sides' security level. Today, science has coined and is actively using a new term "migrantphobia."¹¹ In the last ten years the number of newcomers has dropped considerably: while in 1992 over 90,000 came to the territory, the figure for 2003 was about 12,000.¹² However, not only are common people highly susceptible to the media's influence, but the authorities and self-administration structures also regard external migration as the main factor behind the ethnic conflicts.

There are several generally accepted myths about migration in the Northern Caucasus. The first of them created by the structures of state power of the local federation constituencies says that migration

⁹ See: "Statisticheskie kharakteristiki migratsionnoy situatsii v Krasnodarskom krae," in: *Pravovye aspekty migratsii. Metodicheskoe posobie*, KKKO Obsheee delo, Krasnodar, 2003, p. 58.

¹⁰ See: "Natsional'nyi sostav zhitel'ev Krasnodarskogo kraia," in: *SMI i mezhetnicheskie otnoshenia v Krasnodarskom krae*, Gil'dia zhurnalistov i spetsialistov PR, Krasnodar, 2003, p. 42.

¹¹ G.S. Vitkovskaia, "Vynuzhdenaia migratsia i migrantofobia v Rossii," in: *Neterpimost v Rossii. Starye i novye fobii*, Moscow, 1999, pp. 151-191.

¹² Information supplied by the Administration for Migration, Main Department of the Interior, Krasnodar Territory.

developed into one of the most acute problems (this was especially true of the Krasnodar Territory in 1996-2000, during Nikolai Kondratenko's governorship). The public was taught to look at migrants as a very numerous, homogenous and aggressive group responsible for the drop in standard of living among the local people. This myth proved to be tenacious even though the situation has changed. The simplest analysis of the local statistics shows that we have left the peak of migration behind. At the same time, the natural decrease in population in the Krasnodar Territory is high (as elsewhere in Russia). The same trends can be observed in other regions formerly attractive for migrants. Local public opinion refuses to take this into account. An analysis of publications in the media and statements issued by the local administrators shows that the political elite has not readjusted the ideas about migration it acquired some 8 to 10 years ago at the peak of migration caused by the Soviet Union's disintegration and social discord in Russia. The idea of migration as a negative phenomenon formulated during those trying years has become another myth. It is a stable, abstract, and emotional phenomenon far removed from reality.

It should be said that the larger part of those who recently came to the Northern Caucasus consider it their home. No efforts to control migration can be applied to them. Such measures were taken at the territorial level in the early 1990s when migration was a great problem. For example, a positive role was played by the legal restrictions in the sphere of migration formulated by the leaders of the Krasnodar Territory at a time when federal laws proved inadequate, the country was falling apart, and the central power was weak. The territory did not become a scene of violent conflicts—meanwhile in the early 1990s this was possible. Today, the situation is different: to decrease the risk of conflicts it would have been wise to help the migrants integrate. In fact, both sides need security. The local press virtually ignores the subject of adaptation and integration. A report about a meeting convened in Krasnodar by the main federal inspector of the office of the presidential representative in the Southern Federal Okrug was the only publication on the subject.¹³

The second myth is that migrants tip the region's ethnic balance. A mass sociological poll conducted in Adigey, the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories, and the Rostov Region by the SRRC within the already mentioned "The South of Russia—a Region of National Harmony and Peace" project revealed that the public closely associated the migrant and ethnic issues. When answering the question about the possible settlement of ethnic problems, 15.2 percent of respondents pointed to limiting migration (which was the fourth most frequent answer). The share in the Krasnodar Territory was even larger (20.6 percent). This means that on the whole people are convinced that the ethnic composition of their regions is changing considerably because of migration. An appeal by the Council of Deputies of Anapa (a Black Sea resort) to the President of the Russian Federation and the Federal Assembly is one of the clearest illustrations. It said: "The migration situation taking shape in the Krasnodar Territory is causing concern because it brings in people of different ethnic affiliations and swells the ranks of the ethnic diasporas. This is further complicating the already difficult ethnic situation and tipping the historically created balance in the size of the ethnic groups. Ethnic relations are breeding conflicts; it has become much harder to find work, to provide school education, to pay pensions, child and other allowances: the budgets of all levels have no money for the migrants."¹⁴

The third myth is that migrants constitute a homogenous group united by common interests, problems, and attitudes. Detailed studies revealed the opposite.¹⁵ In actual fact those who come to the region in search of a new homeland are very different people: some blend easily into the environment, while others find it hard (for individual reasons) to adjust. But they all have to deal with problems of getting settled and with the aggressive myths about migration. These myths are very tenacious and largely affect how the authorities cope with the migration processes. In fact, people should be informed about the real situation in this sphere to help them gradually readjust their ideas about the newcomers. It should be said that migrants of ethnic origins different from the local people settling in conservative-minded

¹³ See: "Migratsia: adaptatsia i ekonomicheskaia vygoda," *Kuban segodnia*, 20 February, 2002.

¹⁴ "Migratsionnye protsessy neobkhodimo regulirovat," *Kubanskije novosti*, 31 August, 2000.

¹⁵ See: O.A. Oberemko, M.M. Kirichenko, *Vynuzhdennye pereselentsy na Kubani: institutsional'naiia perspektiva upravleniia*, Krasnodar, 2001.

social milieu create the danger of conflicts: the old-timers, mainly Slavs, regard the newcomers as aliens for two reasons: they belong to “other nationalities” and “they are not ours.” In fact, more often than not such migrants demonstrate no desire to integrate, thus raising the local people’s suspicion and even enmity.

Migration inside the region. It is fairly intensive: Russians are leaving the North Caucasian republics, while those who have chosen to stay behind are living under great pressure from objective circumstances (loss of work because of ruined industrial infrastructure) and from local national radicals. In recent months the Krasnodar Territory has received an ever-growing numbers of migrants from the manpower-surplus mountainous areas of the Central Caucasus and Daghestan. The attitude toward migrants of other nationalities is guarded; the level of distrust is rising along with the numbers of such migrants. Today, relevant studies have established that 10 percent of migrants in any settlement (be it a village, a small town, or a city) is the absolute limit beyond which the local people become hostile to them. There is a pattern: “The experience of other countries has shown that as soon as the share of migrants of alien ethnic groups reaches 10 percent phobias automatically flare up. For example, by the mid-1990s the share of immigrants in France reached 10 percent—at the presidential elections Jean-Marie Le Pen, who described people of alien ethnic origins as a ‘threat to France’s continued existence’ and who suggested that the country ‘should be cleansed of migrants,’ received 15 percent of the votes. A similar situation can be observed in many countries which, starting in the 1960s, have been attracting great numbers of guest workers and migrants.”¹⁶ The traditional bans on migration applied in the “Russian constituencies” of the Northern Caucasus do not apply to migrants from the manpower-surplus areas of the Caucasian mountains, because they are citizens of Russia. Obviously, a new strategy of migration control in the region is needed.

The outflow of Russian-speakers from the North Caucasian republics breeds anti-Caucasian sentiments in the “Russian” federation constituencies where these migrants settle.

Specific modernization processes. Today, sociologists agree that xenophobia increases in periods of social modernization. The Northern Caucasus exhibits several specifics: socioeconomic development and the assimilation of new technologies are proceeding unevenly among different peoples, therefore, behavior and morals are also changing to different degrees in different places. The youth is already taking on “Western” behavioral patterns while the traditionally strong influence of the older people has weakened considerably. We can say that the traditional mechanisms of social control in the tradition-oriented Caucasian societies are falling apart; the process is spurred on by war situations in which a considerable part of population refuses to obey anything but force. At the same time, the traditional idea that “aliens” are enemies and as such can be treated amorally is very much alive. This has already created a greater possibility of conflicts among the young people of the North Caucasian mountain peoples. Today, a large number of local people still bound by the past have become hostage to the problems of the contemporary world. Social modernization among the nations that created what is known as Western civilization took a long time to reach fruition and was fairly balanced: new elements appeared while the old elements died away. In addition, the North Caucasian peoples had the technological achievements of modern society handed to them on a silver platter: this made their transfer too fast and did not give them time to get rid of the archaic behavioral norms and traditions.

Influence of the traditional institutions. Councils of clans (teips, tukhums, etc.), elders, and religious brotherhoods (tarekats) have been functioning on the basis of the norms of the “military democracy” epoch for over 1,000 years. The system of solidarity among relatives stems from the principle of unconditional support for “one’s own people” (irrespective of what they have done), and this increases the possibility of conflicts among the carriers of traditional sociocultural norms.

We can say that the scope of human rights violations committed by the traditional social institutions in the region is comparable to violations committed by the state. This legal system proceeds from the conviction that “aliens” (members of other confessions and ethnic communities) have no rights. It was a common thing for a Shari’a court in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria during the period of independence

¹⁶ *Migratsia i bezopasnost v Rossii*, Moscow Carnegie Center, Moscow, 2000, p. 161.

to sentence a victim of rape (a Russian woman) to forty strokes of the cane for “violating the morals rule,” while the rapist had to pay a 1,000-ruble fine. Conflicts are provoked by the lack of rights of those who live among the autochthonous people and do not belong to them.

The absence of a developed civil society and traditions of partner relations between power and public organizations. Devotion to traditions does not allow a civil society to fully develop. Conservative-minded people elect conservative-minded deputies and are ruled by conservative-minded bureaucrats. The “third sector,” which can potentially play an important role especially at the stages of conflict prevention and conflict settlement, is inadequately involved in the peacekeeping activities pursued by the authorities. Consultative structures that include heads of national-cultural associations under the local authorities should be more active in all the federation constituencies. Today, they are either idle, like the Ethnic Council at the Governor of the Stavropol Territory, or non-existent. At the same time, the number of radical ethnic public organizations in the region is large: all of them are prepared to take part in ethnic conflicts (the level of their readiness is higher than the Russian average).

Negative historical memory. Stories about the Caucasian war of 1818-1864 and the relatively recent memory of the 1943-1944 deportations serve the local peoples as psychological justification for war. The recent quasi-scientific speculations and fiction revive the millennium-old negative ideas about ethnic neighbors. An Ingush, one of the characters in *Our Game*, a spy thriller by John Le Carré, says that the Ossets are not local people, they are aliens, namely Persians turned Christians.¹⁷ In his novel *Iz t'my vekov* (Days Bygone), contemporary Adighe writer I. Mashbash described a combat between Mstislav, Prince of T'mutarakan, and Adighe Prince Reded, an event well known from Russian chronicles that took place around 1023. The writer, making no reference to historical sources, wrote that the Russian prince won because he violated the rules, thus making the distant past a weapon of ethnic-political struggle in our day and age.

Historian A. Kudriavtsev has the following to say about the Northern Caucasus: “This is a region in which history, for objective (as a sum total of cause and result) and also for subjective (because of strongly developed historical memory among the North Caucasian peoples) reasons, exerts a considerable lagging influence on contemporary developments.”¹⁸

Stirring up of religious fundamentalism. The main centers of political Islam (Salafism, or Wahhabism) are found in the South of Russia; the leaders of national radicals are using it to their own ends. In this case, religious and national ideas are fulfilling different functions: the national idea brings all supporters closer in the interests of the national elite seeking more influence and wider potential, while Islamic fundamentalism ensures support of other national groups in Russia and abroad.

Impact of certain neighboring states. Such impact can be intentional and purposeful: some of our neighbors do not want stability in the Caucasus. There are either oil-related interests behind this (attempts to thwart the plans to lay pipelines for Caspian oil across the territory of Russia) or the desire to control “the zone of vital interests.” The easiest way to upset stability in the region is to support the radical ethnic and separatist movements. There are other ways: for example, ethnic and political instability in the Crimea negatively affects ethnic relations in the Krasnodar Territory (through the media that connect the situation in the Crimea with what is going on in the Kuban area). For example, on 13 March, 2004, the *Novorossiiskiy rabochiy* newspaper wrote: “Some of the Meskhetian Turks who have flooded our area plan to move across the ocean at the invitation of the American side... In Novorossiisk there are fewer Meskhetian Turks than in the neighboring districts. At the same time, our people still have not forgotten the arrival of the Crimean Tartars, another people with a sad past, which was no laughing matter. They came here from Central Asia and then moved to the Crimea, another rather crowded place. Those who lived in the Crimea had to move aside to make room for the Crimean Tartars.”¹⁹

How high is the conflict potential of ethnic relationships in the Northern Caucasus? First, we have to agree on methodology: what should be measured to ultimately identify conflict potential, which is a

¹⁷ See: J. Le Carré, *Nasha igra*, Moscow, 1997, p. 274.

¹⁸ A. Kudriavtsev, “Chechentsy v vosstaniakh i voynakh XVIII-XIX vekov,” *Vestnik Evrazii*, No. 1 (2), 1996, p. 95.

¹⁹ “Vot-vot rvanet... V Krymu ochen skoro mozhet sluchit'sia vtoroe Kosovo,” *Novorossiiskiy rabochiy*, 13 March, 2004.

very complicated system? In the event of mass polls, an adequate result can be produced by the percentage of different answers to the following question: What is the state of ethnic relations in a certain territory? Normally the responses are distributed according to a point system. In 1995, 54 percent of those polled in the Krasnodar Territory within the project “The Chechen Crisis in the Mass Consciousness in the Northern Caucasus” described the state of ethnic relations as negative. In 2001, 64 percent of the polled in the same area within the “South of Russia—a Region of National Harmony and Peace” project gave the same answer. This shows that over six years the number of those who negatively assessed the state of ethnic relations in the Krasnodar Territory grew considerably. What happened? In fact, little changed: the war in Chechnia was still going on, while in the Krasnodar Territory conflicts between the local Slav population and non-Slav migrants still flared up from time to time. In 1995 there was probably still hope that these conflicts would be settled in one way or another. The hopes have diminished since that time, while anxiety increased. In some way, this is a result of sharp and, sometimes, irresponsible statements by certain officials of the then territorial administration and Governor Nikolai Kondratenko personally, as well as in appropriate publications on ethnic issues in the territorial and district press.

The structure of the region’s conflict potential can be specified with the help of other questions asked in mass polls, such as the methods to be used to prevent ethnic conflicts. In the 2001 study organized by the SRRC in the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories, Adigey, and the Rostov Region, the answers to the question about the methods for dealing with ethnic problems were the following: “Consistently fight criminal ethnic groups” (23.9 percent); “Create equal living conditions for the members of all ethnic groups” (21.8 percent); “Prevent economic domination of some peoples over others” (16.0 percent); “Limit migration (limit entrance to the region for permanent residence)” (15.2 percent).²⁰

Organized radical groups seeking conflicts are another important factor of the local conflict potential. The radical ethnic groups in the region became better organized. Here is what a student of the Department of Sociology at Kuban State University, who witnessed an ethnic pogrom in the Krasnodar Territory, had to say to M. Savva and I. Batykov. “This happened in mid-December 2002 in the settlement of Afipskiy (Severskaia District, Krasnodar Territory). There are a shop and billiard room behind the railway frequented by local Armenians and Greeks. At about 6 p.m. a PAZ bus with toned-glass windows drew up nearby. The windscreen was clear and it could be seen that the bus was packed with passengers—all the seats were taken. They all looked alike: closely cropped hair, black coats with orange sleeveless jackets (like those used by road builders) over them, and they wore red armbands. All wore black jeans and army boots. For some time they remained seated, then one of them rose from his place and started saying something waving his arms energetically. This all went on for five minutes, not more. Then he distributed bundles wrapped in newspapers. A minute later they were out and lined up behind the shop’s façade. The leader (the man who had distributed bundles) said something. The group folded back their armbands revealing black swastikas against a white background (earlier they had been folded, so invisible). It was a fascist swastika without any additional elements. They discarded the newspapers, in which iron rods were wrapped, and started smashing the parked cars and people standing at the billiard room, shouting ‘Beat the blacks!’ The people (they were Armenians, Greeks and Russians) tried to run away; some of them managed to get into their cars and drove away, two received severe wounds and remained lying on the ground (later they were taken to a hospital). About 15 minutes later some of those who had escaped in cars returned with “reinforcements” from among the locals, but the attackers had disappeared.

“Two days later, inscriptions appeared: ‘Russia is for Russians!’ ‘Blacks Should Go to Mars,’ etc. as well as leaflets of similar content.”

On the same day several hours later, about 8 p.m., a similar attack was made in the district center (the settlement of Severskaia). This happened in the local park, at the Molodezhnoe café on its territory and at the Berezka café nearby. Two days later nationalist slogans appeared in the settlement, too. Here is what an eyewitness had to say:

²⁰ On the results of sociological polls about the state of ethnic relations in the region see: *Mezhnatsional’nye otnosheniia i stanovlenie grazhdanskogo obshchestva na luge Rossii*, KROO “Iuzhny regional’ny resursny tsentr,” Krasnodar, 2002, p. 23.

“Normally, at this time of the day the park is full of slightly tipsy young people flocking from all sorts of cafés, bars, and discos. A large group of Armenians left the Berezka café (here and elsewhere the witness called all non-Slavs Armenians) and moved toward the park. They were followed by a PAZ bus, from which young men with closely cropped hair, orange jackets and red armbands emerged. After lingering for several minutes by the bus, they rushed to the park in close formation. Soon we heard shouts and the noise of fighting. An Armenian with a blood-stained face ran past me into the Molodezhnoe café and shouted something in his tongue; about 10 people ran out of the café and moved toward the dark park. A crowd was moving toward the park from the Berezka café. In the park the group in orange jackets was wielding iron rods. They were beating the Armenians who put up stiff resistance using broken garden benches, trees and fence rods as weapons. I noticed that there was a man standing behind the orange-clad fighters. He did nothing, just looked around as if trying to spot something or somebody. I turned and saw another crowd moving toward the place of the fight. Just then, the man behind the ‘orange jackets’ whistled; his crowd retreated to the bus in good order, climbed aboard, and drove away at high speed toward the highway. The ethnic minorities managed to resist because they learned a lesson from the Afipskiy event. The Armenians started moving around in large numbers with knuckle-dusters. They obviously knew how many attackers they could expect and how strong they might be, therefore they were well-organized and fought with caution.”

These accounts appeared in neither the district nor the territorial press; the press of the local ethnic organizations supplied no information either. What is more, no criminal cases were commenced because there were no complaints. This raises a question about the number of officially registered hate crimes in the region and their real number. If no complaints reach the militia in cases like those described above, the militia’s statistics can hardly be trusted for assessing the conflict level.

The fights in Afipskiy and Severskaia have demonstrated that the thugs are much better organized than before: they wear uniforms (orange jackets) to recognize each other in a scuffle; they have acquired buses to move around; they have learned to conceal their iron rods in newspapers and fold their armbands under to hide the swastika; the leader instructs them before the fight; they act in close formation; they are obviously very fit; they obey a special signal to end the fight, and they retreat in good order.

We cannot ignore the fact that the symbol on their armbands is a copy of the fascist symbol, which leads us to presume that either a new radical organization has appeared in the Krasnodar Territory or an already functioning structure has acquired a special unit with special symbols.

The public is aware of the main ethnic problems; the state of ethnic relations has become something of a myth. The number of negative assessments on three levels (local, territorial, and nationwide) testifies to this: the results of our polls have demonstrated that those living in the Kuban area believe that the situation throughout Russia as a whole is the most alarming (86.1 percent), whereas it is considered much more tolerable in the Krasnodar Territory (63.5 percent), and is much better in the particular settlement where the respondent lives (48.4 percent). In the Krasnodar Territory migration as a phenomenon has also developed into a myth of sorts.

There is the opinion that the level of the conflict potential in the region is diminishing: “an unbiased analysis of trends related to the ethnic relations in the South of Russia suggests that their conflict potential has decreased considerably. Today, they are no open ethnic conflicts similar to those that shook the Northern Caucasus in the early 1990s. This positive development was promoted, in part, by the improved socioeconomic situation and the stronger state.”²¹ In fact, the contracted scope of conflicts in itself does not indicate that the conflict potential has diminished, especially in light of the increase in the state’s repressive possibilities. I have written above that conflicts assume different forms.

My studies of this problem in the Northern Caucasus have led me to draw several conclusions.

The high level of potential ethnic conflicts says that we should work hard to teach our society to be more tolerant. The entire population is our target group, yet we should also concentrate on the following groups: the leaders of ethnic and migrant organizations and journalists. Our public is convinced that the

²¹ N.S. Sleptsov, V.V. Gatashov, “Etnokonfliktogenny potentsial Iuga Rossii: tendentsii evoliutsii i mery po snizheniu urovnia etnopoliticheskoy napriazhennosti,” *Konflikty na Severnom Kavkaze i puti ikh razreshenia*, p. 3.

high level of ethnic tension is a product of the low living standards and that the problem will go away as soon as economic stability and acceptable living standards are achieved. The experience of other countries, however, shows that this is a delusion: violent ethnic conflicts and ethnic separatism happen in the most developed countries. At the same time, numerous public structures engaged in social projects designed to alter the sentiments of the specific target groups have discovered that this method works. These are the SRRC-supported projects designed to improve mutual understanding between the old-timers and the Meskhetian Turks of the Krymsk District (Krasnodar Territory).²² The method of integration and social peacekeeping projects tested by public organizations can be applied by the state and local authorities in the places where tension among ethnic communities or between old-timers and migrants is high. I proceed from the assumption that the authorities need social and political stability in the conflict-prone territories just as much as the local population.

Today, the region's conflict potential is differentiating; the causes and forms of tension and opposition are limited to certain localities and differ from one place to another. This makes it harder to forecast conflicts and poses the question of new study methods. What we urgently need today is mass regional sociological studies of ethnic tension, which should use several methods adequate to the purpose.

As demonstrated above the radical ethnic structures are becoming more organized and better equipped.

So far, the region lacks a system for state monitoring the ethnic conflict potential; the EAWARN representatives are contributing to conflict prevention in the Northern Caucasus, yet their network is not dense enough to ensure adequate monitoring. The present practice of state administration fails to take into account the dynamics of conflict potential and its changing structure, while the current trends toward differentiation of this potential obviously call for tighter control.

²² See: M.V. Savva, "Vynuzhdennye pereselentsy na Iuge Rossii: itogi proekta IuRRTs," *Novaia real'nost*, No. 1, 2002.