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CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGY AS POLITICAL INTEGRATION RESOURCE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RESOLVING ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

KEYWORDS: Conflict Resolution; Political Integration; Identity-based Conflict; Ethnic Conflict; North Caucasus

ABSTRACT. This article explores the different approaches to study of conflict resolution strategy from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. It argues that conflict resolution strategy as political integration resource is a necessary tool for overcoming deep-rooted ethnic conflicts in the instable region of North Caucasus. The author considers structural factors of protracted conflicts and emphasizes a destabilizing role of the re-politicization of ethnicity of a region society in crisis. The concept of ethnic “identity-based” conflicts is the heuristic theoretical model of exploring causes for increased ethno-confessional tensions in the North Caucasus. The article focuses on the ability of conflict resolution theory to de-escalate growing ethno-confessional tensions and transform protracted ethnic conflicts. Interdisciplinary approach to analyzing conflict resolution strategy as political integration resource, while combining conflict theory and neo-functionalistic paradigm, is the methodological basis of this research. The need to stimulate political integration is caused by moral and structural causes: from the ethical point of view, the creation of an inclusive society is the fundamental societal goal; structural factors are related to the need to reduce inequalities and differences leading to social fragmentation and escalation of ethnic conflicts. Among the socio-political conditions of the North Caucasian conflicts, the author calls social inequalities, civil identity crisis, authoritarian and ethnopolitical “renaissance”, economic polarization, “ideological combat” between the secular modernization and fundamentalism. Discussing conflict resolution strategy as political integration resource, it is necessary to consider the following: 1) North Caucasian integration is a macro-political project, the content of which is determined by issues of social security of multiethnic Russia; 2) development of the North Caucasus after the end of armed ethnic conflicts shows the inadmissibility of structural demodernization, fundamentalism and cultural isolationism. Today, the North Caucasus remains a crucially geopolitical macro-region, as it forms the southern volatile frontier of Russia. In this case, conflict resolution strategy must serve as preventive tool on the conflict environment by way of providing structural solutions for deep-rooted socio-cultural problems, transforming and rationalizing regional ethnic contradictions.

1. Introduction

According to D. Sandole:

There are those in conflict analysis and resolution who deal with “startup conditions” and those who deal with process. Practitioners intervening into conflicts-as-process may deal not only initially but only with process. The problem is, once the fire has been put out, unless the underlying startup conditions – the incendiary materials – are dealt with, the fire may reoccur (Sandole 1998, 34).

Although the conflicts that have attracted most international attention in the post-cold war era have been those of the Transcaucasus, another area of both potential and actual turmoil is the North Caucasus. The first example of serious ethnic conflicts in the area, naturally, is the war in Chechnya. However, the existence of this war, and its astonishing cruelty and devastation, has been instrumental in obscuring the other grievances that exist in the North Caucasus region, and that have the potential to escalate into open ethnic conflict. Historically, ethnopolitical and ethno-territorial conflicts can be divided into two main categories, which however spill over into one another. The first type of destructive ethnic conflicts are those among the ethnopolitical groups of the region; the second type is conflicts between ethnic communities and Russia. Doubtlessly, the main example of the unrest in the North Caucasus has been the short but bloody war between the Ingush and the Ossetians. However, this war distinguishes itself only by being the only one of ethno-territorial conflicts in the region that has escalated into war. Among the other known problems, three issues call for special attention: first and perhaps most pressingly, the bid for unity of the Lezgian people in Dagestan and Azerbaijan; second, the latent problem between the Turkic Karachai and the Circassian peoples in the two neighbour republics of Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria; and thirdly the condition of the most complex of all the North Caucasian republics: Dagestan.

In 2014, the entire North Caucasus region was estimated to contain between close to one thousand and several thousand militants (Górecki 2014, 136–151). Estimates of the number of insurgents in Chechnya vary between as few as a dozen or so and just over one hundred. Some experts believe that they are mostly found in the border regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia, mostly operating in these neighbouring republics. The insurgents are mainly active in Dagestan, and in previous years they have also been active in Ingushetia (Danish Immigration Service 2015, 23–24). By the mid-2010s, the North Caucasus resistance movement has become religiously motivated and evolved from a local militant organization into a branch of the worldwide militant Islamist movement (Górecki 2014, 136–151). According to M. Falkowski, the insurgents identify with the global umma – the worldwide

community of Muslims – and the most essential element of their present ideology is “Islamicness” (Falkowski 2014, 17–32). According to O. Bobrova and Y. Latynina, the North Caucasus differs fundamentally from the resistance movement of the Dudayev era. Secular separatism has been replaced by religiousness, the founding of an Islamic state and so-called defensive jihad, which strives to expel infidels from Muslim land (Novaja Gazeta 2010).

The North Caucasus, seen from a regional perspective, remains disintegrational, unstable and conflict area both in global eyes and among most Russians as well. Today, the North Caucasus remains a crucially strategic and geopolitical region, as it forms the southern volatile frontier of Russia. In the wider perspective, the North Caucasus is a key factor for the social stability and political integration of the whole Russia. Russia’s communications with the Transcaucasus and by extension its ability to exert influence on the three independent republics of the region are dependent on stability in the North Caucasus. The war in Chechnya has shown the vulnerability of Russia to ethnic separatism and Islamic fundamentalism in the North Caucasus. Furthermore, it has highlighted the question of Russia’s survival in its present territorial structure. Latent and potential Chechen conflict is only the most prominent among the contemporary challenges to civil and ethnic peace in the region. There are several serious problems, which need to be addressed promptly to secure the fragile newly achieved semblance of stability in the North Caucasus. First is the promoting of multi-level and functional macro-political integration. As Russia has not yet matured to the point of being able to handle ethnic grievances in an effective way, the prospects for stable peace seem dim unless open democratic institutions and conflict resolution approaches are not used to further this purpose (Cornell 1998, 41).

2. Conflict Resolution as Methodological Paradigm: Conceptualizing the Ethnic “Identity-based” Conflict

Theoretical tradition of analyzing conflict resolution strategy as political integration resource is associated with a “conceptual antagonism” of conflict theories, multiculturalism and neo-functionalism, i.e. the contradiction is in interpreting the essence of integration as a way of de-escalating deep-rooted ethnic conflicts in pluralistic societies. Conflict theorists refer to analysis of conflict nature of the ethnicity, multiculturalists rely on normative essence of ascriptive ethnic identification, representatives of neo-functional paradigm interpret the status and rights of ethnic groups from the point of equal opportunities and political integration imperativeness. Comprehensive theory of ethnic conflict must explain why ethnic

relations that are based on peace and integration are more typical than widespread violence, despite serious tensions (Rothman 1997, 213). According to J. Burton,

conflict resolution has been a neglected subject. It is a challenge to all existing capitalist, communist, or other systems. It is a process that can deal with complex situations, both national and international. Its interactive analytical problem-solving processes have been tested and show enormous promise. But the resolution of particular conflicts is just a small beginning. While it helps to provide insights into the nature of conflict and conditions that stimulate conflict, by itself it does not deal with the problem of conflict. Conflict prevention is the goal. Both are part of a process of system change, and their theoretical framework points political systems in the directions required (Burton 1990, 46).

More recently, scholars have tried to better understand the negotiation and conflict resolution dynamics in civil, ethnic, religious and regional conflicts where parties have turned to negotiated approaches to resolve their differences even after prolonged fighting. Unlike those in the past, the majority of conflicts during the last decade of the 20th century ended in negotiated settlements, usually with the assistance of a third party (Babbitt 2009, 539–549). Various explanations have been offered to explain this recent trend. According to R. Licklider,

we have some evidence that long civil wars are disproportionately likely to be ended with negotiated settlements rather than military victory. This is plausible since a long civil war means that neither side has been able to achieve a military victory (Licklider 2005, 39).

Many of the civil and regional disputes that ended in the late 1980s and early 1990s were relatively prolonged affairs, having been aided and propelled by the two superpowers. The desire to end these so-called “proxy wars” as the Cold War wound down encouraged the superpowers to pursue negotiated solutions so that they could exit because continuation had become increasingly costly (Crocker 1992, 110; Weiss 1996, 47).

The model of the international system in the beginning of the 21st century is a subject of constant doctrinaire debates in the international relations, its nature and dynamic being regarded differently by the main actors, from the perspective of their specific goals of foreign policies. There is not a unanimity regarding the qualification of the contemporary international system. According to some authors, this is a post-unipolar period when some political conditions from the Cold War reappear, thus emerging the danger of tensions in the international political context among its key-actors (Boia 2015, 57).

An analysis of conflict resolution theory as political integration resource in acute conditions of Russian macro-structural crisis are one of those of highest theoretical

and practical relevance. This is due to a fundamental position of the integration issue in sociology and political sciences and search for new consolidated resources in the process of de-escalating terroristic threats and overcoming regional conflicts. The interdisciplinary approach to analyzing political integration, while combining conflict-resolving and neo-functionalistic paradigms, is a methodological basis of this research. The concept of ethnic “identity-based” conflicts is an important methodological and theoretical basis at the stage of exploring causes for an increased ethno-confessional tension in instable North Caucasus. This allows us to determine regional ethnic conflicts as identity-based conflicts that are socio-cultural in shape (between ethno-social parties of various levels) and value-oriented, myth-oriented, ideological in matter, with ethno-confessional differences and “historical memory wars” as their source. According to L. P. Repina,

the subject of myths in the history, the role of the dominating and competing versions of the past which developed spontaneously or skillfully introduced in mass consciousness draws the increasing attention of the world historiography. Historical and cultural memory of the collective past, which is the integral part of group, social and national identities, presents a special concern (Repina 2015, 201).

Conflict resolution theory focuses on a resource of inclusive macro-political integration in transforming destructive, deep-rooted identity-based conflicts into constructive ethnic interaction and inter-cultural dialog.

In conflict resolution theory, an important assumption is that although parties may identify specific issues as the causes of conflict, conflict also reflects subjective, phenomenological, and social fractures. Consequently, analyzing “interests” may be less useful than identifying the underlying needs that govern each identity group’s perception of the conflict (Burton 1987, 21; Lederach 1995, 137; Kelman 1996, 77-93; 2008, 143-165). The seminal research on intergroup relations is decades old, but its insights were “discovered” for the first time by political analysts grappling with internal ethnic wars. This included a new look at prejudice reduction and social categorization studies (Brewer/Gaertner 2004, 54; Pettigrew/Tropp 2006, 751-783) as well as research on identity formation – ethnic, religious, racial, tribal (Laitin 1998, 27; Appleby 2000, 114; Marshall/Gurr 2005, 92).

The concept of ethnic “identity-based” conflicts appeared for the first time in the 1990-s (Popov 2011, 14). In identity-based conflict approach the ethnic identity is considered as one of basic human need, while the group identity’s threat is represented as one of group safety risk (Burton 1990a, 29; Rothman/Alberstein 2013, 651). Moreover, two key needs are distinguished: need of identity and need of safety. According to J. Rothman, irrationality, deep subjectivity and uncontrollability of identity-based conflicts are crucial attributes of such conflicts (Rothman 1997, 73). Motives for ethno-confessional groups to be involved in deep-rooted,

identity-based conflicts will affect the solution perspectives of such conflicts; for the sake of satisfying their material interests, people would hardly risk their lives consciously. In ethno-secessionist conflicts, at least one side could be identified as belonging to a culturally distinct (ethnic / religious) group or at least mobilized on behalf of this group. The North Caucasian conflicts belong to this category. Cases of ethnic conflicts in their 'pure form' – with one group acting against another because of some 'natural' hostility – are rarely encountered, although as violence escalates, ethnic or religious affiliation can emerge as the sole elective principle in the choice of victims (Tishkov 2001, 58).

Participation of any parties in identity-based conflicts exhibits an obvious self-sacrifice, but not an inevitable risk, i.e. readiness to sacrifice for the sake of ethno-religious identification and value ideals is experienced emotionally, irrationally (L. Coser), acknowledged and verbalized by conflict participants. Ethno-confessional tension escalates in cases, when an ethnocultural group tends to consider itself a 'victim' of value-oriented pretensions of 'other' antagonistic groups. The problem of transnational terrorism has the same socio-psychological mechanisms, based on identity politicization and fundamentalism. Though its tenets are contested, some general characteristics of fundamentalism can be identified from within the religious discourse. These include the perception that it is a reaction to secularism, rationalism, and modernity. However, modernity is accepted where it does not contradict some basic religious principles. Fundamentalism creates boundaries. It has a tendency to form strong identities exclusive of others and thus divide people into them and us; it divides people into friends and enemies, good and evil. It erects boundaries between those who are members and those who are not. These boundaries can be physical, but often the barriers are social, psychological, and behavioral, which is why some have argued that fundamentalism produces a particular intensity of non-rational or irrational passion not subject to the firm control of reason. Fundamentalists are driven by fervor, rage, passion, fanaticism, and zeal - making religious fundamentalism absolutist, self-righteous, arrogant, dogmatic, and intolerant of compromise (Cavanaugh 2009, 18-26).

Groups that rely on the benefits of globalization and technological advances to conduct operations across international borders are threatening the maintenance of international order. Their tools of violence range from conventional weapons of war to more modern weapons of mass destruction and potentially asymmetric 'cyber attacks'. At the same time, the proliferation of internal armed conflicts points to similarly complex security challenges within nation-states. These conflicts have not always attracted the same amount of publicity as transnational terrorism, which does not, however, make their threat to international and human security any less real (Federici 2017, 230).

As J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk, and I. Zartman explain, conflict resolution is a “vibrant, interdisciplinary field where theory and practice pace real-world events”. They note further:

Scholars working on CR study the phenomenon of conflict and analyze ways to bring it under control, bringing their insights and concepts to bear on actual conflicts, be they domestic or international, so as to foster better and more effective relations between states and people. Conflict Resolution is about ideas, theories, and methods that can improve our understanding of conflict and our collective practice of reduction in violence and enhancement of political processes for harmonizing interests (Bercovitch/Kremenyuk /Zartman 2009, 5).

Interdisciplinary methodology allows analyzing the conflict / integration dialectics as an integral phenomenon conditioned by a diversity of social, historical, ethnic, cultural and political factors. At the stage of studying the structural causes of ethnic tension escalation in the North Caucasus, an important methodological basis is the concept of “identity-based conflicts” by J. Burton and J. Rothman. It allows determining the identities conflicts as social ones by their form (occurring between social subjects of various levels) and as ideological conflicts by their content, relying on cultural distinctions (Rothman 1997, 19). The conflicts resolution theory focuses its attention on the capacity of political integration to transform the destructive “identity-based conflicts” into constructive conflicts of interests: the integration is interpreted as a method of resolving the group controversies on the basis of making the ethnic identity as non-political concept.

Resolving one conflict, however, does not prevent the next one. Conflict resolution, unlike dispute settlement, is not primarily or even mainly concerned with particular cases. Its processes are analytical and problem-solving, and its approach is within a theoretical framework or explanation of conflict. Its main thrust is, therefore, not merely in conflict prevention, in isolating and removing the sources of conflict, but also in conflict ‘prevention’: promoting the conditions that create cooperative relationships (Burton 1990a, b; Burton/Dukes 1990a, b, 83).

If we want to get successful in discovering causes of ethnic “identity-based” conflicts, we have to start with a definition that will lead to constructive methods of conflict resolution. We consider the ethnic identity to be a self-perception that is filled with a “cultural formulae”. The “cultural formulae” is based on basic needs and inner preferences, group characteristics and collective values (J. Rothman). Cultural “hyper-identity” may be group or inter-group in ethnic conflicts, however, it is always the source of negative cultural stereotypes and conflict catalyst. The parties may perceive themselves as personal ‘maximizers’, while protecting individual values, pursuing their own interests and expressing individualistic needs;

they may be ethnic groups and feel like they are a part of collective whole; they may feel like they are carriers of multiple identities and get involved in a conflict at the inter-group level. These perceptions are generated by the cultural formulae and ethnic hyper-identity, which becomes value-ideological basis of conflict parties and it is filled with personal, group and inter-group emotions and meanings (Rothman/Alberstein 2013, 631–659).

3. Conflict Resolution Strategy as Political Integration Resource: Rebuilding North Caucasus

According to J. Burton,

civilizations are at a critical stage, perhaps more critical than at any past stage. The past, from feudal times to modern industrial society, has been a consistent one of power politics. Indeed, even in the United States there has not been yet the movement required to abolish the essence of slavery. It has merely altered in form. There is no need any more for entrepreneurs to own and lock up slaves. They are there in their thousands in ghettos throughout the country, available at rates far below that which would be required to avoid malnutrition. They cannot run away, there is nowhere to go. Those who try to break out of the ghetto, by stealing or as entrepreneurs peddling drugs, are locked up in prison. It is important to place present conditions in a human perspective: serfdom in one of its many forms is still with us. Until we can get rid of it there will be violence and conflict (Burton 1990b, 35).

One of the first Russian concepts of conflict resolution in the North Caucasus was V. Tishkov ethnological analysis, dedicated to the Chechen conflict settlement. According to V. Tishkov,

the instability in Chechnya and the adjacent North Caucasian lands, as well as the crisis of Russia's statehood in the period of its deep transformation, generate large-scale violence on a routine everyday basis with poor prospects for stability and reconstruction. Before starting major reconstruction programs something should be done to bring into political and public discourse the attitudes which clean the road of the conflict and do not close the door for the Chechens to exercise these shared identities. There is no Russia-Chechnya' identity disposition. Otherwise, Chechens are excluded from the country's populace justifying not only atrocities on the part of the military but also a politics of caging representatives of the whole group into a category of 'no-citizens' or 'enemy citizens' without rights and privileges. This is an impossible start for post-conflict reconstruction (Tishkov 2001, 50).

M. Kramer described the most destructive North Caucasian conflict in Chechnya as a stalemate since rebels “continued to inflict enough damage on Russian soldiers to erode their morale and create the appearance of an endless, unwinnable war” (Kramer 2004, 12), but in 2006, the Russian government claimed that the war was won and the rebels routed (Baev 2006). However, as the war was winding down in Chechnya after 2004, the conflict intensified in the region as a whole (Markedonov 2010, 140). By 2009, significantly more violent events were occurring in Ingushetia and Dagestan, the republics adjoining Chechnya to the west and to the east (Mendelson/Malarkey/Moore 2010, 81; Howard 2011, 230; Kuchins/Malarkey/Markedonov 2011, 31–54). In a region where the biggest concern of ordinary people is economic insecurity and where corruption is rife and barely concealed, many young men have turned to radical Islam (Markedonov 2010, 143; Gerber/Mendelson 2009, 31–51). The attacks by the state forces on Islamists has furthered radicalized many and produced a tit-for-tat upsurge in violence by local military jama’ats (militant Islamic communities) who have increasingly attacked the organs of the Russian state and its local representatives (police, military, and political figures) (Kuchins/Malarkey/Markedonov 2011, 31–54). By 2008, the Chechen rebel leadership was integrating their separate military campaign with the wider opposition to Russian presence in the region under the aegis of the “Caucasian Front” This latest chapter of the North Caucasian conflicts has not yet reached its dénouement, though predictions of wider and deeper conflicts are common despite President’s declaration of the end of “counter-terrorism actions” in Chechnya in 2009 (Zhukov 2012, 144–156; O’Loughlin/Witmer 2012, 178–201).

The escalating of socio-political disintegration amplifies ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, intolerance, isolation tendencies and ethno-political regionalization of the North Caucasus, while causing anomy, apathy, inactivity, and egging followers of radical ideologies on ethnopolitical and religious extremism. Xenophobic and nationalist ideas are widely spread in the Russian society. Slogan “Russia for Russians!” is to some degree or another supported by the majority of interviewees since the beginning of 2000s; in 2011 it was supported by 58% of interviewees (Levada-Tsentr 2011). According to S. Janković and A. Kubiček,

Ethnic and national are substantially related, mutually dependent and reversibly associated categories of identification, reflected as a prism that compounds particular sorting and ordering the social world in accordance with the moral projection, and thus, interests of particular group. Thus a major form of their intertwining might be found not in mutually exclusive dualism between „ethnic” and „civic” nationalism, but more closely in conflation and embroidering of „ethnic” elements into etatistic conceptions, that – through particular (de)politicization, creates a diverging framework, i.e. internal and external ordering principles of a „national”, political community. For these reasons, the issue of trans-substantiation of ethno-national is especially important on the level

of production of group-self-identification and moral qualifications contained within it, as it reflects the valid composition of political communities (Janković/Kubiček 2016, 30).

Actualization of anti-conflict and civil mechanisms of political integration is associated with the necessity to develop a secular and supra-ethnic model of macrosocial consolidation that supports cross-ethnic cooperation and cross-cultural dialog. Political integration as a process of supporting and promoting civil institutions and enabling to ethno-confessional groups the possibilities to cooperate on a non-conflict basis and according to principles of safety and equality, becomes the primary method of resolving regional ethnic conflicts. According to J. O'Loughlin and F. Witmer,

the conflicts in the North Caucasus have evolved from a frontline in Grozny, the Chechen republic, in the early stages of the war in 1999–2000 to a scattered pattern of guerrilla warfare on Russian forces and local allies by a myriad of locally-based rebels as this pattern of fragmentation is evident in the local violence density scores and maps after 2006. What remains uncertain though is why this fragmented pattern has developed and is intensifying? What accounts for the fact that one community has produced a mobilized anti-Russian population while adjoining and similar communities remain quiescent? In these differences lie a real aim of disaggregated study of civil war, one that must take the local context of such activity much more seriously (O'Loughlin /Witmer 2012: 201).

The specifics of ethnic identity-based conflicts as threats and challenges of integration of the North Caucasus is that they go on against a collision of competing values and ethnic identities. The idea of value-oriented collision clarifies the concept of a regional conflict as religious-based conflict, emphasizing the systemic and genetic nature of this explanatory model. From the structural point of view, regional conflicts appear as an effect of escalation of ethno-confessional contradictions between Islam and Christianity, social inequalities and ethnic mobilization, threatening political integration in the polyethnic society. In contemporary Russia internal conflicts become obviously ethno-religious. Over half of civil conflicts after the World War II are classified as ethnic or religious. Identification of an ethnic conflict as an anti-governmental rebellion on behalf of an ethnic group is a ground for classifying the ethno-regional internal conflict (Fearon/Laitin 1996, 715–753). With the spike in “internal” wars after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the then-UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, issued the UN Agenda for Peace in 1992. The report identified four overarching tasks for the UN and others to undertake preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. These proposed goals introduced a broader conflict resolution research and policy agenda, beyond the emphasis on strategic bargaining and deal making. It effectively extended conflict resolution concerns to both latent and active conflicts and

to the increasingly difficult challenge of rebuilding so-called failed or failing states. In doing so, it called for understanding conflict dynamics within and between identity groups as well as governments and for exploring how relationships between such groups could be sustainably transformed – beyond negotiated settlements – such that violence would not recur (Babbitt 2011, 49).

Political integration is characterized by a tendency towards widening ethno-confessional contacts and dissolving religious boundaries in contemporary Russia. Systemic stability and safety of polyethnic regions depend on scopes and level of a macrosocial solidarity and civic integration. To this effect, a complex analysis of sociocultural integration as a process of value-oriented consolidation, making a high level of civic self-awareness and super-ethnic identification happen for ethno-confessional parties is top priority. The issues of identity construction and social group cohesion on the global level are associated with wide-scale transformations that are predetermined by the transnational capitalism, modernization and globalization. Research in theories of political integration and individualism marks out such key processes of social changes as the presence of a certain pressure, targeted identity and individualization policy and personal culture segregation (Brubaker 1996, 40).

The necessity of stimulating political integration in a multi-confessional society is determined by value-oriented and instrumental reasons, i.e. from the ethic point of view, creation of an integrated ‘society for all’ is a self-apparent societal goal; structural integration factors are associated with the necessity to narrow down cultural and social differences, leading to social de-fragmentation and affecting adversely modernization processes and ethnic conflict prevention, i.e. integration implies molding a super-ethnic and civil identity.

Political integration depends on three different, but interrelated factors, such as: 1) acknowledging pluralism of ethno-confessional identities within the unique normative and legal space; 2) representing ethnic and religious groups for providing a guarantee of their interests being considered in the process of governmental decision-making; 3) re-distributing economic resources between various ethno-confessional parties for preventing any social inequalities, polarizations, disproportions, or fragmentations based on an economic status, ethnic and religious identity.

Political integration aims at creating conditions for inclusive socio-cultural adaptation, based on tolerance and supra-ethnic-civil solidarity. Integration strategy has become a part of the migration policy in Russia, since 2012, when the “concept of governmental migration policy of Russia” was adopted. Important elements of integration policy include creating large conditions for adaptation and integration of migrants, while just a few years back the idea of “integration” was not in the “lexicon” of the Russian migration policy.

Now, all prerequisites for stating more ambitious task in the area of migration policy, while focusing not only on labor migration, on deportation of non-documented migrants and interception of illegal migration, matured in Russia as a country that is fit with resources. The time has come to mold migration flows and integrate migrant categories that the country needs (Riazantsev 2014, 32).

The theory of integration attempts to combine concepts of an individual freedom and group loyalty as contra-narratives of forced assimilation, which may be considered as a movement towards pluralism and respect of cultural differences at individual and collective levels. Political integration forms rational and communicative mechanisms of civil consolidation based on principles of social equality and justice. Social justice, the creation of the 'society for all' is an overreaching goal of integration. Justice is referred to societal principles and values, which make it possible for social parties to gain a fair share of benefit for a fair share of responsibility within their life together in the society. Concepts of social justice determine a civic society as the most desirable and achievable one, provided that rights and obligations are assigned in accordance with the agreed principles of fairness; it is an integrated society, where social parties may participate in the social, economic and political life on the basis of equality of rights and opportunities, fairness and dignity.

Political integration policy has social inclusion as its value-oriented and regulatory goal, while implying equal opportunities and rights for all social parties: the system becomes more integrated as a result of implementation of this task, which implies equality and improved life strategies. Integration critics focus on adverse effects of the integration, causing a repressive image of assimilation policy and 'forced' cultural sameness to appear in one's imagination.

Political integration issues may be summarized in the following way in the modern scientific discourse: 1) political integration has got a moral and value-oriented imperative and systemic task referring to social progress in the direction of a fairer and equal society; 2) conflict factors of social inequalities and economic polarization may be smoothed in the process of political integration by means of social inclusion of individuals and groups that were previously excluded from certain types of activity; 3) in its pursuance of social inclusion, universality and uniformity, the integration policy may level out any values of multiculturalism and principles of cultural diversity; 4) maximizing focus on the regulatory goal of the political integration may interfere with political transformations.

Political integration reduces ethnic tension, which is associated with a high level of solidarity and safety, attenuation of ethno-confessional mobilization and reduction of a negative stereotypization of 'others' as 'religious enemies.' While analyzing the status of religion and ethnicity in dynamics of regional conflicts, one should point out a relation between group identities and primordial values of closed traditional societies, where civic self-awareness and individualism do not play any

evident ideological role. Currently, such societies may function in the globalized world by means of preserving their own culture, based on collective values; group identification is correlated within such collectives with ethnic values and religious traditions. According to, an appeal to individual interests cannot patch a crack as a result of ethno-confessional contradictions, if we are dealing with an ethnic group-wide collision in the process of conflict mediation; attempts to manipulate groups may lead to identity-based conflict intensification.

According to E. Babbitt,

negotiation and conflict resolution concepts provide powerful lenses through which to assess conflict dynamics and design appropriate strategies for moving these dynamics in a constructive direction. The biggest challenge in building bridges to policy is in transferring not only the checklist of 'best practices' but also the essence of analyzing international relationships through the conflict resolution lens. We have made good progress in this direction to date, and the signs are promising for the collaboration between theory and practice to deepen in the next decade. The prerequisites of such collaboration include the ability of governments to admit that they do not have all the answers and can learn better ways of dealing with conflict and for scholars to fully appreciate the constraints under which policy makers are operating and gear their analysis to these realities (Babbitt 2011, 541).

Ethnic "identity-based" conflict has its own unique traits and some of these elements will be more evident than other, nevertheless they all are common denominators of the genesis of such conflict. The primordial approach helps us explain the conflictogenic nature of ethnicity and fundamentalism; the concept of ethno-confessional entrepreneurs explains, how institutional factors and ethnic stereotypes interact. Ethnicity and religion are the embodiment of a powerful emotional stress that may be re-activated, provided the groups are aware of a threat to the ethnicity, religious values and interests, which leads to ethnification, ethnic intolerance and, ultimately, a violent ethnic conflict (Blagojevic 2009, 7).

As violence increases, the security dilemma will become more acute and the desire for peaceful and cooperative strategies of conflict management will weaken (Lake/Rothchild 1996). This will tend to thwart the prospects for successful negotiations unless instruments of outright strategic leverage and coercive diplomacy can be found (Corbin 1994, 65; Hampson 1996, 117). Once violence has reached a threshold where no further escalation is possible without major costs, the disputants may be willing to consider other alternatives than the use of force. However, some conflicts get stuck in the middle range of the escalation curve, i.e., violence is ongoing and episodic but not sufficient to make the idea of a political solution an attractive alternative. Such conflicts are sometimes referred to as 'protracted' or 'intractable conflicts' because they are marked by self-sustaining patterns of hostility and violence; they have multiple sources or causes – including greed,

self-interest, security dilemmas, and bad neighbors or neighborhoods – and there is no apparent end in sight to violence. Lacking any apparent deadline, impending disaster, or sense of time shifting to the other side's advantage, these conflicts can be sustained for years unless others intervene and encourage the parties to change their strategic calculus and consider their negotiation options (Crocker/Hampson /Aall, 2004, 23; Babbitt 2011, 540).

The “antagonistic core” of mobilized ethnic identity is stipulated by a hyper-negative value-oriented stereotypization of the “others” in the process of constructing ethno-religious “borders” in the North Caucasus. Religious and ethnic differences do not lead to inevitable cultural conflicts, because molding prerequisites to sociocultural integration and interethnic dialog; however, when ethno-confessional differences are politicized and interpreted as threats to the group safety, identity-based conflicts arise. If Russian government does not take any effort aiming at ensuring integration and communication between ethnic groups and restraining their ethno-political pretensions, or if they are not capable and do not have any resources to that matter; if they are weak and lack intermediary institutes of the civil society, a risk of acute safety dilemma faced by the conflicting ethnic group rises. Each of ethnic group expect the other group to take advantage of government's weakness and push its ‘political agenda’. For the purpose of self-defense, the group will take “preventive measures”, which may be interpreted by the opposite party as open aggression (Achkasov 2013, 64).

4. Integration Policy and Conflict Resolution: Major Ethno-Regional Perspectives

As risk factors in the North Caucasus and Chechen republic V. Tishkov calls the absence of consistent and well-funded Russian state policy of post-conflict reconstruction; political disintegration, alienation and social disorientation of the civilian population; widespread human rights abuses; internationalization of ethnic conflicts and external support for separatists (Tishkov 2001, 52). Protracted conflicts are a consequence of re-actualization and radicalization of politicized ethnicities. Social inequalities, fragmentations and polarizations serve as systemic factors that determine the acuity of ethnic tension and escalation of identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus. The analysis of social tension escalation and cultural identity mobilization suggests a destructive action of factors of ethno-religious intolerance and political disintegration in a region. Identity-based conflicts is not only an armed or political and legal standoff, but also the conflicts of different historiographies, historical and cultural values and symbols. This gives rise of a phenomenon of ‘competing cultural and historical traditions’, most often such antagonism

of religious or ethnic traditions within a multi-national society, fight for the 'historical heritage' (constructionists write, not without a reason, that there are not any objective historical facts, they are actually a product of interpretation of those with more or less rights to legitimate nomination of such facts) or conflicts between traditions of representatives of different social groups. A bitter rivalry of religious, as well as ethnic traditions is possible in a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic society; opposition of regional traditions, fight for determining the essence of the conflict and establishing causes of such conflict etc. Such 'war of interpretations', fight with the help of one selected subset of historical facts or another becomes a prologue of acute global conflicts.

Regional identity-based conflicts are dangerous in the way their genesis and dynamics present social dissatisfaction that is highly politicized; and the action of extremism and violence sets implies concentrating an aggressive potential in the point of ethnic intolerance and confessional irreconcilability. The degree of violence in identity-based conflicts is determined by the intensity of inter-ethnic tension and social dissatisfaction, and scope of institutional support and political mobilization being the conditions of an armed confrontation. According to V. Dudouet,

although non-state armed groups represent primary stake-holders in contemporary political conflicts, there is still little understanding among policy-makers or scholars of the internal drivers and dynamics which shape their radicalization and de-radicalization processes. For instance, one often hears the assertion that bringing rebel leaders and so-called "spoilers" to the negotiation table or converting them into peaceful politicians requires weakening, splintering, or completely dismantling their militant structures (Dudouet 2012, 47).

The fundamental obstacles to resolve ethno-regional conflicts – and major contributing factors to insurgency – remain political disintegration, social inequalities and corruption at all levels of state administration. This increases citizens' alienation from the state and promotes the search for radical alternatives, including an Islamic state (ISIS) and jihad. In recent years, deep social frustration is a major conflict driver. The authorities are perceived as unable to solve either structural concerns or daily problems. Many feel local elites have privatized the state. Those who want better services try to leave, increasing pressure on neighbouring regions and Russia's big cities. The situation is further complicated by alternative concepts of ethnopolitics and statehood. Islamists instrumentalise social problems and offer the non-democratic state based on Sharia (Islamic law) that they say will be better equipped to deliver social justice. Growing political disintegration, unresolved social problems and ineffective institutions contribute significantly to the appeal of radical ethno-nationalism and Islamist ideology, erode trust in the state and are a major reason why the North Caucasian conflicts are so difficult to solve.

Realistic and achievable goals of conflict resolution as political integration resource in the North Caucasus are: 1) strengthening the rule of law and the protection of human rights; 2) democratization and meeting the basic needs of the populations; 3) ensuring personal security for the North Caucasus people; 4) civil society building and socio-economic development; 5) improving relations between North Caucasus ethnicities and the larger Russian society.

Policy makers and conflict resolution practitioners still have a tendency to overlook or dismiss research findings. In part, this is because of the inevitable differences in professional cultures between academia and the “real world” (e.g., different professional languages, incentive structures, time horizons for results). In order for good research to inform effective practice, more links must be forged between the two. There are three ways such linkages can be strengthened: 1) cross-cultural emissaries – individual diplomats who read and follow conflict resolution research ideas and scholarship and who can translate such ideas to their counterparts; 2) bridging institutions – think tanks at which conflict resolution research can be digested and translated into policy language; 3) professional schools of international affairs – the next generation of policy makers exposed to conflict resolution research ideas in their graduate education and then taking these ideas into practice with them (Babbitt 2011, 543).

The problem-solving workshop is one type of third-party assisted dialogue, undertaken by both official and non-governmental actors. This activity is directed at ethnic, racial, or religious groups who are in a hostile relationship. Like “circum-negotiation”, this dialogue occurs at a quasi-official level around or prior to the formal peace process (Saunders 1996). Dialogue is directed at both officials and civic leaders, including heads of local non-governmental organizations, community developers, health officials, refugee camp leaders, ethnic / religious leaders, intellectuals, and academics. This dialogue process can be assisted by specialized training programs that are directed at exploring ways of establishing and building relationships, furthering proficiency in facilitation, mediation, and brokering, data collection, fact-finding, and other kinds of cooperative decision-making (Babbitt 2011, 539). As L. Kriesberg notes, much of this activity is directed at developing “constituency support for peace efforts” (Kriesberg 1996, 58).

5. Conclusion

Regional contradictions between the systemic modernization and social disintegration are the primary source of identity-based conflicts. Structurally, escalation of violence in regional conflicts is determined by the intensity and scope of ethnic mobilization and social dissatisfaction. Political integration in the North Caucasus

has fundamental goals of ensuring social safety and overcoming ethnic contradictions in their most destructive form of identity-based conflicts. Ethnopolitical mobilization, fundamentalism, social inequalities, economic polarization and civil identity crisis are structural factors that determine the acuity of socio-cultural tensions and re-escalation of deep-rooted conflicts in the North Caucasus.

The “ideological combat” between the secular modernization project and fundamentalism with growing social disintegration is the primary source of ethnic conflicts in a region. Structurally, escalation of violence in regional conflicts is determined by the intensity and scope of ethnic mobilization and social frustration as necessary conditions of a collision. Regional ethnic conflicts affect existentially meaningful collective values and group identities, that is why the participants are involved emotionally into identity-based conflicts. Such irrational conflicts are a destructive goal in itself, i.e. ethnic politicization and negative stereotypes in perceiving “the others” play a key role in conflict initiating.

Russian multi-confessional regions may overcome social disintegration and prolonged regional conflicts by a targeted design of integrative civil identity, democratization, pluralism and tolerance strategies. The integration strategy in the North Caucasus must be built up not on assimilation policy and difference suppression, but on civic solidarity and inter-ethnic cooperation principles. Confessional and ethno-national exclusivity turn into specific features that strengthen religious and ethnic identity. Establishment of tolerant relations in a polyethnic and multi-confessional North Caucasian region is of special importance.

North Caucasus region may overcome social disintegration and prolonged regional conflicts by a targeted design of integrative civil identity, democratization, ethnic pluralism and tolerance strategies. Discussing conflict resolution as a resource of political integration in the North Caucasus, it is necessary to consider the following: 1) regional integration is a macro-political project, the content of which is largely determined by issues of social security of multiethnic Russia; 2) the development of the North Caucasus after the end of armed ethnic conflicts shows the inadmissibility of structural demodernization, religious fundamentalism and isolationism. Conflict resolution strategy as political integration resource must serve as preventive tool on the conflict environment by way of providing structural solutions for regional problems, transforming and rationalizing deep ethno-confessional contradictions.

All of these issues would merit further analysis though complementary methodologies offering a more independent perspective on ethno-regional conflict dynamics. In particular, the findings gathered here call for more in-depth research on the boundaries between political integration / conflict resolution strategies and different forms of ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus; on the internal dynamics and decision-making involved in shifting goals and strategies; and on their various implications for the processes of ethno-religious radicalization and political

integration. There also needs to be more interdisciplinary investigation on the linkages between conflict resolution strategy, social cohesion, political integration, negotiations, democratic transitions, and post-conflict institutionalization. Finally, such analysis might offer useful lessons for constructive international engagement to support the conversion of state challengers into active peace-builders, as long as these actors are politically-motivated movements, which enjoy strong social legitimacy and aspire to take part in democratic politics. Indeed, our findings call for a rethinking of conventional intervention in ethno-political conflicts, promoting the social cohesion and political integration during negotiations; offering assistance to support democratic transitions in the North Caucasus that possess a future role within a peaceful environment, in contrast to criminalization strategies (e.g. through anti-terrorist measures such as proscription and counter-insurgency) which prevent ethnic groups from expanding their civil capacities.

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