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# INTERETHNIC RELATIONSHIP OPTIMIZATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF DAGESTAN: MODERN PROJECTIONS

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## *Abstract*

The article studies processes of post-Soviet political transformation in Dagestan, the role of political technologies for optimizing inter-ethnic relations. The authors study the issue by overcoming long-standing and simplified interpretations of local politics which consider the republic as a battlefield of various ethnic groups for power and resources. Key factors that prevent primitive ethnicization of complex conflicts were identified. The article aims to identify and analyze political technologies for optimizing interethnic relations in the Republic of Dagestan in the atmosphere of development of two trends. The article analyzes conditions that keep Dagestan in a continuous mode of "unstable stability". The theoretical basis of the study is constructivism which assumes an understanding of inter-ethnic relations as a plastic phenomenon susceptible to the influence of political technologies. This approach requires targeted modeling based on the state national policy. Identification and analysis of political technologies for inter-ethnic relationship optimization are based on an empirical basis. The method of in-depth interviews with heads of urban and rural administrations, leading political experts of the republic and leaders of local public opinion identified the most promising areas for optimizing interethnic relations in Dagestan. Within the state national policy, political technologies for optimizing interethnic relations involve the most efficient technological mechanisms: from predictive to socio-economic, from socio-cultural and legal to traditional. Most of these mechanisms are efficient within the partnership model of interethnic relations. This model makes it possible to implement the potential of power structures and civil society to prevent interethnic conflicts in the republic.

**Keywords:** Republic of Dagestan, optimization, interethnic relations.

## 1. Introduction

For a multinational country, interethnic relations are the issues of their self-preservation. Today, when Russia enters a zone of heightened geopolitical risks, land and border disputes are aggravated in the North Caucasus, identification of political technologies for optimizing interethnic relations is an extremely urgent task. Moreover, the problems of interethnic relations and the state national policy in relation to Dagestan are more relevant. The key feature of the republic is ethnic diversity. The population consists of 14 main ethnic groups and many ethnic sub-groups. The risks of interethnic conflicts forced the government of Dagestan to establish the State Council. It consists of 14 members by the number of the ethnonational groups in the republic. It is an equivalent of a collective presidency and co-public leadership enshrined in the 1994 Constitution (Zalesny, 2015). The political of Dagestan takes into account the complex ethnic composition of the republic. There is a certain analogy with the concept of Leyphart (1997) who suggested the idea of co-social democracy. Its leading principles is a political coalition, proportionality of the constituent elements, possibility of using the veto power. This situation allows us to speak about a complex nature of the Dagestan socio-political system which refutes facilitated judgments about the nature of interethnic relations in the republic.

## 2. Problem Statement

The main task is to describe construction of interethnic relations in Dagestan.

Multinationality of Dagestan made some researchers search for the most simplified and primitive explanations of local politicies. They consider the republic as a battlefield of various ethnic groups and ethnic elites for resources and power. In the article "Russia pays no attention to violence in the North Caucasus," Lipman (2009) argues that political conflicts are "part of the inter-ethnic struggle between the ethnic groups" (par. 13). Unfortunately, ethnocentric interpretations of Dagestan policies are quite common. In the 1990s, Ware and Kisriev (1999) argued that relative political stability in Dagestan is due to activities of "ethno-parties". In fact, Dagestan society and politics are much more complicated. They are characterized by "cross-segmentation". Different divisions (ethnic, confessional, territorial, political, clan, blood-related, etc.) do not coincide with each other (Matsuzato & Ibragimov, 2005, p. 759). Similarly, Kisriev (1998) and Bobrovnikov (2002) concluded that Dagestanis is loyal towards the Jamaats rather than ethno-national groups. Large ethnic groups are not subjects of political actions. Complex interweaving of ethnic, confessional, territorial, kinship and other identifications contributed to stable Dagestan society. In contrast to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the system of "cross-segmentation" or multi-component identification hinders the division of Dagestan society by ethnic lines as. The conclusion made by Matsuzato and Ibrahimov (2005) is quite natural: "In contrast to societies where different segmentation lines coincide, in Dagestan, the ethno-confessional" uncleanness "of ethnic groups often strengthens their legitimacy" (p. 761). Thus, the departure of the Dagestan society from the principle of "ethnic purity" is one of the decisive conditions that keep the region within the framework of "unstable stability". The term *unstable stability* was introduced by Walker (2000). Later, the term was used in the works by Matsuzato and Ibrahimov (2005) and Magomedov (2009) to analyze the escalation of violence in the region in the 2000s (Magomedov, 2009). Thus, the abandonment of the principle of "ethnic purity" in combination with the

Jamaat system of local self-government and the decentralized system of local Sufi Islam (with pluralism of its constituent units - tariqats) are political stabilizers in the ethnonational sphere of Dagestan. These factors serve as an obstacle to the primitive ethnization of complex conflicts. This specifics of intra-ethnic ethno-political realities sets a direction for further research.

## 3.    Research Questions

What are the key trends that determine the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of Dagestan?

Will the combination of the methods of political designing and in-depth interviews increase the heuristic potential of ethnopolitics and deep our understanding of processes in the republic?

It is necessary to find out if it is possible to implement effective state ethno-national policies oriented towards the partner model of interethnic relations in Dagestan.

What is the role of federal and regional authorities and civil society in solving and preventing ethnic conflicts in the republic of Dagestan?

## 4.    Purpose of the Study

The article aims to identify and analyze political technologies for optimizing interethnic relations in the Republic of Dagestan in the atmosphere of development of two trends: increasing political risks and political modernization of the republic.

## 5.    Research Methods

The combination of an innovative approach and qualitative sociological methods made it possible to achieve the research goal.

The basic conceptual assumption is a definition of interethnic relations as a mobile social construct whose parameters are determined by the surrounding socio-cultural environment, development of civil society, specifics of statehood, ethno-cultural traditions and long-term historical memory of peoples. In accordance with this approach, interethnic relations at are considered as a process that has two balancing features: inertness and plasticity (Starostin, 2016). The inertness stems from the presence of long-term historical, cultural-mental, and historical-political factors that affect interethnic relations. Being a construct, interethnic relations can be formed, technologically constructed and maintained. In the world political science, a number of foreign and domestic researchers consider ethnic groups and nations as political constructs (Anderson, 2001; Hobsbaum, 1998; Tishkov, 2015).

This theoretical thesis within the framework of the design methodology allows us to consider inter-ethnic relations as an object of modeling by political elites within the targeted state national policy in accordance with social and state demands, requirements of the era and social and political modernization process (Salgiriyev, 2012). This state national policy involves optimization of the model based on which socio-political construction of interethnic relations should be carried out, a general development strategy should be built and political technologies of restraining destructive ethno-political competition and conflicts should be formed. Thus, the theoretical and methodological research basis focuses on the model of

formation of interethnic relations that is adequate to the tasks of political modernization as a concept of state national policy.

This work is based on the results of sociological surveys conducted in 2015-2018 as part of the project "Civil Unity, Ethnocultural and Confessional Diversity as Value Foundations and Factors of Consolidation of the Russian Society" (2018), statistical data on socio-economic development of regions. However, the most valuable array of empirical data was obtained as a result of field research conducted in the Republic of Dagestan since March 2017 to September 2018. This includes qualitative methods: 1) in-depth free-form interviews lasting from 1 to 1.5 hours. The respondents were heads and employees of urban and rural administrations; leading Dagestan political analysts and observers; informal local public authorities. The method of in-depth interviews made it possible to determine trends and risks of development of the ethnopolitical situation in the republic and in the Russian Federation; 2) The content analysis of mass media (including the Internet) was used to identify stages of politicization of ethnicity in the North Caucasus in the post-Soviet period, determine parameters of the socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political development of regions affecting ethnic and national practices.

## 6. Findings

The evolution of inter-ethnic relations in the North Caucasus region and in Dagestan is based on interaction of a number of factors. Among the most important are permanent political contacts with the central authorities of Russia; errors of the administrative-territorial and national-territorial division in the Soviet and modern Russian periods, errors of the national policy; importance of ethnic identities, conjugation of challenges of ethnoregional separatism, tension in the interaction between ethnic groups; a lack of a mechanism for solving land issues. The intersection of these factors caused conflicts but, at the same time, generated possibilities for preventing and solving interethnic conflicts. The policy of the modern Russian state in the sphere of interethnic relations aims at constructing interethnic relations whose boundaries are set by the level of socio-economic, socio-cultural, political development of regions densely populated by ethnic groups, goals are determined by the need to modernize social and political interactions between federal and regional authorities. According to the respondents, construction of the national civic identity is a main method for strengthening interethnic stability in Dagestan and Russia as a whole.

Traditionalization of political culture in the North Caucasus region weakens common civil identity which is a potential conflict factor in interethnic relations. The Dagestan experts and managers emphasized that the modern geopolitical situation, dynamism of modern public life in Dagestan, as well as in other republics of the North Caucasus can give an ethnopolitical tone to any emerging conflict. Moreover, this trend will increase the risk of geopolitization of interethnic conflict.

The next most important factor aimed at optimizing inter-ethnic relations is the quality of public administration. Since many ethnopolitical conflicts were caused by the lack of a competent national policy of, it is necessary to improve the quality level of the latter. Programs aimed at the normalization of inter-ethnic relations should take into account existing problems and contradictions, and possibilities for overcoming them. The main methods for preventing inter-ethnic conflicts in the Republic of Dagestan are as follows:

1) Increasing the control of authorities and management over land use, land relations focusing on interests of all land users.

2) Improving the regulatory framework, developing and implementing programs for effective opposition to nationalist, separatist, extremist, religious extremism.

3) Settlement of the problem of divided peoples living in the Republic of Dagestan and adjacent regions and sovereign states of the Transcaucasia. It is necessary to develop programs and projects to improve the quality of life of divided peoples, ensure their rights and freedoms, including regular communication with other states.

4) Resolving the problems of deported and resettled peoples preserving the existing ethnic and economic parity. At the same time, the rights of deported peoples should not be protected at the expense of the rights and freedoms of other peoples settled in these territories (Abakarov, 2013).

5) Implementing measures against the outflow of the Russian and Russian-speaking population from the Republic of Dagestan (combating terrorism and extremism, developing the Russian language, Russian-speaking schools).

6) Improving the socio-economic well-being of the population, the investment climate, creating new jobs, developing communication infrastructure.

7) Modernization of the system of upbringing and education, developing a respectful attitude to other ethnic groups and religious communities, studying various religions and peoples living in the territory of the Republic of Dagestan and Russia as a whole.

8) Strengthening the personnel potential of the administration of the Republic of Dagestan through selection according to the meritocratic principle, with the obligatory observance of the principles of ethnic representation, excluding the possibility of "ethno-monopolization".

9) Increasing the responsibility of civil servants, combatting corruption, cronyism and tribalism.

10) Developing the autonomy, enhancing rights and competences of local governments, preventing and solving ethno-political conflicts.

Within the state national policy, political technologies for optimizing interethnic relations involve all existing mechanisms: predictive (continuous monitoring of the level of tension in interethnic relations aimed at predicting and preventing exacerbations, tracking indicators of latent competitiveness); socio-economic (taking comprehensive measures aimed at alleviating socio-economic inequalities of ethnic groups, enhanced economic investment in areas with increased conflict-potential); legal (improvement of legal foundations of interethnic relations, development of civil society structures); sociocultural (optimization of the sociocultural and linguistic environment of interethnic relations by maintaining tolerance of inter-ethnic communication, ethnic traditions, stimulating activities of cultural societies, implementing the Russian language and culture as a common base of interethnic communication); traditional (the use of mediation in resolving conflicts, involving religious leaders and representatives of the informal ethnic elite in mediation). Most of these mechanisms work effectively in the framework of the partnership model of interethnic relations (Magomedsalikhov, 2003; Salgiriyev, 2012).

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, the efficiency of political modernization of Dagestan depends on the development of a management strategy to reduce ethnopolitical competition, improve and strengthen interethnic relations. This requires solving problems of divided peoples, developing programs of socio-political and economic stimulation of cooperation of ethnic groups, solving problems of employment and social security of forced migrants and refugees, developing targeted federal programs, measures to prevent the outflow of the Russian and Russian-speaking population from the republic and ensure the observance of their rights; implementing measures aimed at improving socio-economic well-being and reducing unemployment, strengthening the rule of law and improving the psychological atmosphere; rehabilitating repressed ethnic groups; combatting corruption and terrorism, protecting rights of citizens; strengthening the ideology of interethnic and interfaith tolerance, expanding the contribution to of all traditional religions represented in the republic.

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