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CHECHEN REPUBLIC IN 2003

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Abstract

The Chechen Republic and the socio-political processes taking place in it have become the subject of special studies by both domestic and foreign authors. In this article, we set the task of showing the processes that took place in 2003 and largely determined the political situation that developed in subsequent years. An important event in the political life of the republic in which clashes, purges, religious schism continued, was the organisation of a referendum in March 2003 on the new Constitution of the Chechen Republic. The referendum, despite all the shortcomings of its organisation and criticism, both in the Russian Federation and abroad, was very important for the Kremlin, since it decided the issue of the Chechen Republic joining the Russian Federation. For the first time since the start of the counter-terrorist operation in the fall of 1999, concrete political steps were taken to resolve the situation instead of general phrases about "dialogue with the entire Chechen people." In our opinion, the question was not so much about the Constitution, but about the future of the Chechen people and the Chechen Republic, and this was well understood by many of its inhabitants. No less important was the issue of the organisation and results of the presidential elections in the republic in October 2003, the holding of which the Kremlin took under strict control and in which A. Kadyrov won.

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1. Introduction

The republic has not yet recovered from the shock caused by the terrorist attack on December 27, 2002, when the Government House was blown up, and a loud scandal erupted in Chechnya after its leader decided to appoint a local official, who had previously worked as deputy head of the Ministry of Finance, as the new Chechen finance minister. dismissed from office due to transfer to another job. The public pick of the republic's leaders ended with the resignation of prime minister, which raised fewer questions than his appointment with a train in the form of a multivolume criminal case (Muradov, 2003). The federal centre has once again demonstrated support for heads of Chechnya, especially since a referendum was to be held soon, and after it the presidential elections. The support of the Head of the Administration of the Chechen Republic on the part of the President of the Russian Federation was of a long-term nature, despite sharp opposition even from his entourage, and here the personal qualities of his protégé played an important role here.

2. Problem Statement

The federal centre took measures for the political settlement of the conflict in the Chechen Republic in 2003.

3. Research Questions

The questions of the article are

- the social and political process in the Chechen Republic in 2003;
- organisation and conduct of a referendum and presidential elections in the Chechen Republic.

4. Purpose of the Study

The article aimed to analyse social and political processes in the Chechen Republic in 2003.

5. Research Methods

The principles of historicism, scientific objectivity and consistency were used as research methods. The work is based on the problem-chronological principle.

6. Findings

The plans for the referendum drew a severe reaction from separatist leaders, vigorous criticism of Russian human rights activists, many Western politicians, organizations, and the media. However, the very idea of a referendum was not actually disputed. The head of the OSCE assistance group in Chechnya said that referendums could not be held in a republic where an 80,000-strong group of troops is deployed and where the refugee problem has not been resolved. Alekseeva (2003) chair of the Moscow Helsinki Group, member of the board of the Human Rights Commission under the President of Russia, said "for

the Chechen people, the referendum is currently not the most urgent topic. For the most part, Chechens are non-politicized people, and they do not advocate independence and its attributes. All they need is for peace to come to Chechnya finally". An aide to the President of the Russian Federation speaking on Chechen television, openly formulated: "Either a referendum or the continuation of lawlessness".

The ongoing military conflict was indeed a severe obstacle to free expression of will. However, before the referendum, the Russian authorities promised to remove checkpoints in Chechnya restricting free movement and transfer control over the situation to the republican authorities and local law enforcement agencies.

In addition to these promises, both local politicians, the Chechen diaspora in Moscow and other large cities of Russia, and federal politicians were involved in the preparation of the referendum. For example, the deputy head of the presidential administration, who visited the Chechen Republic at the end of February 2003, announced the broadest autonomy for Chechnya, in which there will also be a place for those who do not see themselves as part of Russia. On March 13 the head of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation, arrived in Chechnya, who said that after the referendum, the development of an agreement on the delimitation of powers between the federal centre and the Chechen Republic would begin (*author's remark*: this agreement was never signed). The media commented on the activity of politicians in the following way: "Recently, there has been increased activity of VIP-visits to the rebellious republic. A representative delegation has just visited Chechnya, which includes influential and authoritative figures..." On March 5, a partial withdrawal of military units of the federal group from Chechnya was started. It was announced that in the coming days 1270 servicemen and 200 units of military equipment would be withdrawn from the republic, with a total number of the grouping about 80 thousand servicemen (Newsru, 2003). It was declared that compensation would be paid for destroyed housing and property. Back in January-February, the military conducted large-scale "cleansing" operations in the villages and towns of the republic.

A few days before the referendum, Putin (2003a) himself made a televised address to the residents of the Chechen Republic, urging the Chechens to go to the referendum. "For the first time, the citizens of the republic have a historical chance to decide their destiny ... The Constitution will allow the people of Chechnya to establish their lives independently. Moreover, to realize that extensive autonomy within Russia, about which so much is being said now. For the same purpose, a special treaty between the Federation and the republic will be jointly prepared and concluded," the President of Russia, said. The religious factor was also involved: President of the Russian Federation held a meeting with the spiritual leaders of Chechnya. Moreover, on March 21 in the Kremlin the star of the Hero of Russia was presented to the general director of the republican energy company "Nur-energo". "For the first time, a Chechen with a peaceful profession, bringing back to life what was destroyed by the war, became the owner of the highest award," the newspaper "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" noted.

On March 23, a referendum was held in the republic, in which, according to official data, criticized by PACE and human rights activists, 89.48% of the citizens included in the voting lists took part. Russian President Putin (2003b), commenting on the preliminary results of the referendum held in Chechnya, said that the people of Chechnya had chosen in favour of peace and positive development together with Russia. "We have closed the last serious problem related to the territorial integrity of the Russian

Federation", he said, speaking in the Kremlin at a traditional meeting with members of the Russian Government. The referendum did not mean the end of the confrontation in the republic – clashes with the militants continued, in which units formed from Chechens began to take an increasing part. Terrorist attacks were organized: on May 12 in the regional centre Znamenskoye, on May 14 in IIskhan-Yurt, on June 20 at the RUBOP building in Grozny, on July 5 in Moscow, at a concert in Tushino, a military hospital in Mozdok was blown up, an electric train in Stavropol Territory. Nevertheless, the federal centre continued the course taken for a political settlement, although it was understood in a somewhat peculiar way. A "pre-parliament" was formed – the State Council of the Chechen Republic, the first meeting of which was held on June 21.

On July 4, 2003, the President of Russia signed a decree according to which the responsibility for managing the Regional Operational Headquarters was transferred to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Putin (2003c) at a press conference for domestic and foreign media noted that he personally in Chechnya "will be satisfied with the person who will enjoy the support of the people of the republic." This phrase made it possible for observers to say that the Kremlin distanced itself from the current head of Chechnya within the framework of the favorite principle of "equidistance", but in reality the situation developed somewhat differently.

In early July, the first meeting of the working group on the preparation of an agreement on the delineation of powers between the federal centre and the Chechen Republic was held in Moscow. It was preceded by the publication in the Chechen media of a draft of this document, granting the republic powers unprecedented in a federal state: from the emission of cash and the formation of free economic and customs zones to the transfer of full rights to the republic to sell oil and other raw materials. At the same time, the Kremlin, oddly enough, reacted both to the draft and to the statements of the head of the Chechen Administration, more than tolerant: they say, we will discuss everything; we will not reject anything on the fly.

On August 20, the election commission of Chechnya stopped accepting documents for registering candidates for the office of President of the Chechen Republic. Fourteen people announced their intention to run for president (Dzis-Voinarovsky, 2003). In reality, only the first four candidates on this list could count on votes. It is interesting that Khasbulatov (2003), the former Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, announced on July 31 that he intended to run for president of the Chechen Republic. However, on August 14 he refused to participate in the elections, because, according to him, he did not believe in their honesty and believed that they aggravate the situation in the republic. The current head of the republic also took steps aimed at gaining the confidence of the voters of the Chechen Republic, in particular, he sent a letter to the heads of the power structures of the Russian Federation on one of the most painful problems of the republic – kidnapping. It noted that it has not yet been possible to exclude the facts of crimes committed by representatives of power structures; people in Chechnya continue to disappear without a trace. Kadyrov (2003b) said that there are "werewolves in camouflage", "werewolves in armoured vehicles" operating in the republic and called for the creation of an interdepartmental commission with the participation of higher security officials, to give it broad powers, to identify and punish "werewolves on armoured vehicles".

On the eve of the presidential elections, the former commander of a tank regiment Yu. Budanov (RIA, 2003) was finally convicted, accused of murdering an 18-year-old resident of the village Tangi-chu. Part of the Ichkeria parliamentary deputies "dismissed" A. Maskhadov (Vesti, 2003) from office, on September 24, the Chechen branch of the "Rosselkhozbank" money to issue compensation to the first 150 applicants. At first, the presidential elections in the Chechen Republic remained intriguing due to the participation of prominent politicians. After, thanks to the efforts of the federal and republican authorities, the incumbent head of Chechnya was left without significant competitors, the presidential elections became completely predictable, and as a result, the OSCE and the Council of Europe lost interest in them. These organizations categorically refused to send their observers to Chechnya, as did the leading human rights organizations in Russia. As a result, more than 40 observers arrived in Chechnya, most of whom represented the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the CIS countries, the Helsinki Group, and on October 5 Kadyrov (2003a) won a convincing victory in the elections. The opinion of the Washington Post can serve as the quintessential assessment of the Western media and politicians of these elections: By using violence, pressure and an obedient judicial system, the authorities left Kadyrov's (Baker, 2003) three most powerful rivals behind, turning Sunday's election from a competition into a coronation". At the inauguration held in Gudermes on October 19, A. Kadyrov (Vaskin, 2003) said that religious extremism and terrorism must be fought in the bud: "I emphasize with full responsibility that terrorists must not only be "drenched in toilets," but they must be destroyed in the bud". He also explained how he was going to build relations with Moscow, stating that he would seek special economic status for the republic. "The political status of Chechnya was determined as a result of the referendum – it is a republic within the Russian Federation. At the same time, we will seek to obtain the status of economic autonomy," he said. He noted that the Chechen people are not to blame for the fact that the republic was destroyed – "it is the fault of those who gave the republic to the enemies of Russia".

7. Conclusion

In 2003, the federal centre technically solved two major political problems: it held a referendum and the election of the President of the Chechen Republic. However, despite this, the situation remained difficult, as terrorist attacks and clashes continued, and kidnappings continued. In 2003, 574 people were abducted, of which 19 were found killed, and the abductors returned 45. In October 2003, 11 police officers were killed, and 24 police officers were wounded. In November 2003, 8 police officers were killed, and 26 police officers were wounded. In December 2003, 9 police officers were killed, and 15 police officers were injured. Among the civilian population of the Chechen Republic, 38 people died in October 2003, 25 in November, and 25 in December. There were 30 robberies in October 2003, 36 in November, and 20 in December (Kavkaz-uzel, 2003). In the economy, the situation was also far from favorable, so, because of the audit, the Accounts Chamber concluded that in 2003 the Federal Target Program was financed of 3.44 billion rubles, which is higher than the level of previous years. At the same time, none of the restored industrial facilities was commissioned in 2003. 30 % of the territory of the Chechen Republic is classified as an ecological disaster zone; 40 % of the territory has the status of a zone with a particularly unfavourable ecological situation.

According to the Ministry of Health of the Chechen Republic, only 20 % of the population of the Chechen Republic is practically healthy, more than 40 % of children are born sick, and 80 % of newborns have pathologies, and stillbirths are still frequent. In many districts there is an increase in oncological diseases, the number of patients with chronic pulmonary diseases (including an open form of tuberculosis), diseases of the cardiovascular, genitourinary systems, allergic, skin and other diseases are progressing. As a comparative analysis shows, in 22 (out of 23) classes, the incidence in the Chechen Republic is significantly higher than in the Russian Federation: for diabetes mellitus – 10 times, mental disorders – 4 times, pneumonia and diseases of the digestive system – 3-4 times, diseases of the blood, hematopoietic organs and anaemia – 25 times, diseases of the nervous system and congenital anomalies – 5 times (Khasuev, 2005). However, the most serious problem, in our opinion, was the lack of clear powers of authority for the new leader when he was the Head of the Administration and at the beginning of his activity as the President of the Chechen Republic, especially since the military did not want to take the civilian power of the republic seriously and limit their absolute power here. This problem was solved by the elected president, relying on the population of the Chechen Republic, the Muslim clergy and support at the highest federal level. Nevertheless, many strategically important economic issues, in particular, on oil, have not been resolved, despite repeated statements. In this regard, one cannot fail to note the catastrophic level of unemployment (80 %) and the sluggish restoration of the destroyed Grozny.

The 2003 year ended with the holding of elections to the State Duma, A. Zavgaev (Rimskij, 2004) became a deputy from the Chechen Republic in a single-mandate constituency. Among the parties, "United Russia" received the majority of votes, as expected.

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