

The Separatist Conflict

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Abstract: There is a strong opinion among researchers of regional processes about the relationship of separatism with ethnicity. For the effective regulation of separatist conflicts, it is important to assess the importance of ethnicity in the development of separatism and to determine whether ethnicity and separatism are always united by a causal relationship. The primary purpose of the study is to focus on the process of ethnicization of separatist conflicts. The focus is on the issue of endowing separatist conflicts with ethnic characteristics; and the causes of the conflicts initially lay in a non-ethnic plane. This study seeks to analyse the reasons for the appeal of separatism to the topic of ethnicity; the instrumental possibilities of ethnicity in the context of separatism are assessed. To that end, the concept of ethnicity in this survey is taken into consideration through the prism of instrumentalism.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Separatism, Secession, Regional Conflicts, Ethnicisation, Ethnic Conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

A description of separatism is the tendency of a state of cultural, religious, ethnic, tribal, racial, governmental or gender separation from the larger group. Groups simply looking for greater autonomy are not separatist as such (Bayramov, 2016). Some critics equate separatism with religious segregation, racist segregation, or sexist segregation, but most separatists argue that separation by choice may serve useful purposes and is not the same as government-enforced segregation (Prokhorenko, 2018).

The adjective “ethnic” is one of the most commonly used when it comes to separatism. It must be recognized that political science has a strong opinion about the relationship between separatism and ethnicity, as well as the presentation of ethnic identity and ethnonationalism as key factors and grounds for supporting the idea of independence. Revealing the concept of separatism, a number of researchers mention the ethnic component, which leads to the interpretation of separatism as a purely ethnic phenomenon (Bayramov, 2016). V.A. Tishkov calls separatism the most radical form of ethnonationalism defining this concept as “a requirement of sovereignty and independence for an ethnically designated territory” (<http://www.valerytishkov.ru>), thereby emphasizing the ethnic nature of separatism.

When considering separatism through the prism of ethnic conflict and the struggle of an ethnic group for the recognition of its rights, ethnic contradictions

existing in the state are interpreted as a necessary element for the escalation of the separatist conflict. In his writings, E. Smith points out that separatism certainly assumes the politicization of ethnicity, since it has a belief in the identity and exclusivity of the ethnic community; it is this faith that gives the community the right to demand independence in deciding its fate (Smith, 1979). In addition to the fact that the manifestation of separatism in this vein can be personified with ethnic nationalism, the struggle of an ethnic group for self-determination, and belonging to an ethnic group, ethnic identity can serve as a basis for supporting separatism; there is a point of view that in their natural essence, ethnopolitical and ethnoreligious processes and technologies are separatist in nature and are most often expressed in the conflicting desire of ethnic communities or individual territories to achieve self-determination (Kritsky, 2007).

It is worth mentioning the supporters of primordialism, who note the conflicting nature of ethnicity, explaining this by the manifestation of the so-called “ancient enmity” being primordial intergroup contradictions and innate hostility, which can only be suppressed by the power of authoritarian regimes or external coercion” (Tishkov, 2012). From the point of view of this approach, the separatist conflict, the parties of which are often ethnic groups, is primarily considered only as a consequence of ethnic differences. “According to this logic, the conflict between Serbs and Croats was explained by hatred of representatives of these peoples towards each other, as well as the Karabakh conflict was explained by hatred between Armenians and Azerbaijanis” (Tishkov, 2012).

Based on the assumption that any separatism is either based on ethnic identity or refers to ethno-

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nationalist rhetoric, it can be concluded that politicized ethnicity contains a potential threat to the integrity of the state, and separatism is solely a consequence of the crisis of interethnic relations in the state. In this case, ethnicity and separatism are perceived so interconnected that any focus of escalation of the separatist conflict is analysed for interethnic contradictions while ignoring other possible factors of separatism activation. Ethnicization of separatist conflicts is observed, which, based on the interpretation by the sociologist G. Berking, implies endowment with ethnic meanings of social phenomena and processes, regardless of the presence or absence of ethnic content (Berking, 2003).

To form a complete picture of events taking place in the region, it is important to assess the place of ethnicity in the development of separatist processes and to determine whether ethnicity and separatism are always united by a causal relationship.

METHODS

The concept of ethnicity in this paper is considered through the prism of instrumentalism, which allows us to assess its potential as an instrument and a matter of rational choice that arises in the dynamics of rivalry between political elites.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Being one of the radical forms of upholding the interests of a regional community, separatism is based on the region's desire for separation, which is based on the idea of the special fate of this community and its differences from the majority of the state's population. In addition to the territorial affiliation, the collective identity of such a community can be based on a common religion, culture, language, and ethnicity. The basis of ideas about special features that make a group unique or different from the most residents of the state is "ideas about existing or misunderstood mythologized or far-fetched differences and inequalities" (Prokhorenko, 2018). Subsequently, all of them can become the primary or secondary basis for uniting supporters of the independence movement, as well as be used by participants in the separatist conflict for political purposes, in the struggle for political status and other tangible and intangible resources.

In the case of separatism, the variety of differences underlying the self-identification of a regional group and the objective reasons associated with its need for

independence determine the numerous combinations and variations of this phenomenon. All this in a complex complicates the determination of the causes of the separatist tendencies, which resonated in regional communities.

It is noted that "separatism is caused not only (and not even so much) by the sphere of interethnic contradictions: it is the result of an imbalance of power between the Centre and the periphery" (Avramenko, 1997). Therefore, when studying separatist processes, one should not rush to label the phenomenon with ethnicity. "A very controversial moment in the interpretation of separatism is its consideration exclusively through the prism of national relations. It seems that such an approach leaves the field of scientific interest without similar manifestations of separatism that are not directly related to ethnic issues" (Avramenko, 1997).

Ethnicity has a serious instrumental potential, which provides an appeal to the theme of ethnicity even in cases where the causes of separatism obviously lie in a non-ethnic plane. This tendency is characteristic not only for separatism; in the modern world, many problems of a non-ethnic nature are interpreted by addressing the theme of ethnicity (Achkasov, 2015). In support of the instrumental nature of the appeal to ethnic issues, R. Brubaker emphasizes that conflicts driven by battles for power between protesters and those in power are ethnicized in a new way, and are framed in ethnic terms in a new way, too (Brubaker, 2004). Using the ethnicity banner simplifies the understanding and interpretation of social processes by the public.

For example, the conflicts between the Spanish and the Catalan authorities over the autonomous status of the Catalan region in 2006, as well as the language policy of the regional government in the autonomous region were presented by the media as a confrontation between the Spaniards and the Catalans. The political conflict regarding the division of powers between the centre and the region was thus filled with ethnic meaning.

Ethnicity is the same marker that is selectively used to include or exclude from the group (Schlee, 2004), as well as in cases where ethnicity is imposed by a third party to identify participants in the separatist conflict clearly. The separatist process, by its nature being a regional conflict, is more difficult to interpret when central and regional authorities become participants. In

such cases, ethnicity can act as a label to hang, which means to simplify the understanding of the conflict. V.A. Tishkov cites Bosnia as an example, "where the overwhelming majority of the population until the 1990s did not attach significant importance to the ethnic factor. However, ethnicity was essentially imposed by politicians on local Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, and imaginary cultural differences became a real basis not only for the separation of communities but also for their fierce confrontation during the civil war" (Tishkov, 2012).

In addition, the representatives of the conflicting parties themselves can often resort to ethnicity as an effective tool for rallying and mobilizing the territorial community. At the height of the confrontation over the expansion of fiscal powers between the Spanish centre and the Catalan regional authorities, the latter supplemented the theses on Spain's economic dependence on Catalan tax revenues with emotionally charged allegations of oppression of the Catalan nation.

Appeal to ethnic discourse provides the emergence of a group emotional reaction among participants in the separatist conflict. The struggle for historical justice and a bright future for the people cause a vivid emotional response in contrast to the problem of the redistribution of powers and resources between a centre and a region. In this case, the separatist conflict in the minds of participants and outside observers is transformed from the struggle for resources and territories into a struggle for the interests of the community and the protection of common values. "As a result, conflicts arising from competition for access to power and resources are understood as a manifestation of the mutual incompatibility of ethnic groups", and their historically developed hostility (Achkasov, 2015).

As V.A. Tishkov notes, "the updated memory of the Stalinist deportation of Chechens, as well as of the Caucasian war and valour of the Highlanders in it, was the most important mobilizing factors for the participants in the armed struggle in Chechnya, although this was a conflict primarily about contemporary problems" (Tishkov, 2001). Supporters of separatism justify the need for independence by appealing to historical memory, and also to common linguistic and cultural sources.

The mobilization potential of ethnicity is regularly used in separatist conflicts; however, ethnic nationalism becomes only one of the possible, but optional conditions for the emergence of separatism.

So, V.R. Filippov states that "when considering any case of separatism, we should first of all consider not the sociocultural ("ethnic") factors, but the specific political and economic interests of all participants in the conflict situation, which determined the manifestation of the slogans of self-determination" (<http://ashpi.asu.ru>). It is necessary to remove ethnic camouflage from separatist conflicts and to reveal the motives that prompted regional actors to support separatism.

The ethnocultural uniqueness of the region can be considered as a tool for building special economic and political relations with the centre. Refusal to receive privileges from the central authorities may lead to exploitation by the regional elite of the idea of ethnic discrimination, infringement of the rights of ethnic groups, which are regarded by society as evidence of the need to create an independent state. At the same time, ethnicity in this manifestation becomes only the "tip of the iceberg". The regional political elite addresses the topic of ethnicity as a resource that can help achieve political goals.

In revealing the nature of separatism in his study, J. Sorens emphasizes that voters in Western Europe are more concerned with socio-economic problems, rather than cultural and linguistic issues. The researcher can conclude that ethnic and regional identity help in the integration and mobilization of the population only in those cases where the achievement of economic and political benefits is at stake (Sorens, 2005). "In line with the instrumental theory of nationalism and ethnic conflicts, all movements that appeal to identity and self-determination appear to be an instrument for achieving elite corporate interests, but this does not make these movements fictitious, or simulated. Instrumentation does not necessarily mean simulation, although it also happens" (Narochnitskaya, 2015).

It is necessary to separate cases when ethnic-based contradictions form the basis of the community's desire for independence from separatist movements that protect the non-ethnic interests of the ethnic community. The indicated variant of separatism should not be interpreted as ethnic only because the ethnic group is a key actor in the process. It is important to identify the real reasons for the escalation of the separatist conflict.

SUMMARY

Political science has a strong opinion about the relationship between separatism and ethnicity, as well

as the presentation of ethnic identity and ethnonationalism as key factors and grounds for supporting the idea of independence. The appeal to the problem of ethnicity occurs even in those cases where the reasons for the desire for independence obviously lie in a non-ethnic plane. Separatists use ethnic rhetoric in the hope of enhancing the support of the region's inhabitants. Appeal to ethnic identity is an instrument for achieving regional interests.

The mobilization potential of ethnicity is regularly used in separatist conflicts, regional elites striving for independence use ethnicity as a tool to rally the population. Turning to history, and also common linguistic and cultural sources, supporters of separatism substantiate the need for the region to become independent.

In addition, the ethnocultural uniqueness of the region can be considered as an argument in building special economic and political relations with the centre. Refusal to receive privileges from the central authorities may lead to exploitation by the regional elite of the idea of ethnic discrimination, infringement of the rights of ethnic groups, which are regarded by society as evidence of the need to create an independent state. The regional political elites refer to the topic of ethnicity as a resource that can help achieve political goals.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we note that the tradition of defining any ethnic group's desire for independence as ethnic separatism simplifies the assessment of separatist movements, while the search for the root causes of discontent and the assessment of the factors that prompted the community to secede are fading into the background. In this case, the conflict between the centre and the region is always viewed through the prism of ethnic contradictions. However, in order to fully understand the nature of separatism, as well as to prevent this threat to the integrity of the state, it is necessary to carefully identify the causes of the crisis in the relations between the centre and the region in which the community that supports independence lives.

Due to the fact that ethnic conflicts are difficult to resolve by their nature, labelling the separatist conflict with ethnicity by both parties and outside observers leads to the fact that ethnically coloured rhetoric begins to prevail in the interaction of conflicting parties, which leads astray the real causes of the conflict. In fact, the

ethnicization of the separatist movement reduces the possibility of success in the negotiation process, translating this confrontation from conflict of interests (i.e., from measurable categories such as powers, resources, territory) into the plane of values.

The emotional content of ethnic confrontations makes it difficult to effectively regulate and resolve it within the framework of the constitutional legal field. Overall, it can be concluded that the ethnic factor plays an essential role in the formation and development of regional separatism. However, it seems important to us not to lose sight of other factors determining the separatist processes in the region, as well as to approach the study of separatism as a complex phenomenon due to a number of reasons.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

This paper is a result of the collective effort of three authors; each author carried out laborious and voluminous work:

Aigul Zaripova wrote and developed introduction and methods

Aidar Zakirov wrote and prepared the results and discussion

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