

ADMINISTERING OR GOVERNING: THAT IS THE QUESTION

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In mid-May, Russia's authorities created a new bureaucratic structure – the North Caucasus Development Ministry. The move came as no surprise: whenever a centralized system of governance is unable to resolve one or other issue, it resorts to creating a new administrative body vested with the responsibility to tackle it. However, in actual practice, such decisions often produce an effect diametrically opposite to the designers' intentions – sometimes a new body begins a struggle for its place under the sun and embarks on a tug of war with earlier-established administrative structures in an effort to appropriate their functions, and to compete with them for resources. Thus, instead of improving the quality of governance and administration, the creation of new administrative and governance bodies frequently results only in their worsening. It seems that in the case in point we are faced with the same erroneous logic, which is destined to produce the same lamentable results. The number of 'players' involved in the processes of governing and administering the North Caucasus Federal District has significantly increased. Moreover, it should be noted that the issue of allocation and distribution of resources, powers and status, as well as the issue of reconciling the various interests of the 'players', have so far both remained unresolved.

The past few months have seen a flare-up in the discussion on the future of the North Caucasus Federal District, focused on whether or not it would be abolished after the conclusion of the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, and also on whether or not it would be merged with the Southern Federal District. The answers to these questions were given in mid-May. In spite of widespread expectations that an enlarged administrative structure would be established to replace the two existing federal districts, the *status quo* was preserved. Moreover, the Russian authorities resorted to the same tactics they had already used with regard to the Far East and the Crimea, and so created a new ministry – the North Caucasus Development Ministry, to coexist with the office of Presidential Plenipotentiary for the North Caucasus. Furthermore, according to media reports, Alexander Khloponin – who has recently been deprived of the post of Presidential Plenipotentiary for the North Caucasus, but has kept his position as Vice Prime Minister of the RF Government – is expected to retain some control functions with regard to the North Caucasus.

Can it really be said that these changes in the North Caucasus administrative structure have reflected the objective needs of the North Caucasus Federal District, which have become apparent over the course of its four-year history? It is common knowledge that an administrative system does not represent an independent element of any governance system. An administrative system should be designed in accordance with strategic aims set within one or other field. In the field under consideration, such aims are set in

the *Strategy of Socioeconomic Development of the North Caucasus Federal District until 2025*, adopted in September 2010. The Strategy envisages that, as far as the socioeconomic development of this federal district is concerned, top priority should be given to the task of implementing major investment projects guaranteed by the State. The Strategy has been repeatedly criticized in some quarters for setting unrealistic goals and underestimating the North Caucasus' own potential for development, as well as for the failure to set clearly defined targets for law enforcement. The past few years have shown that the Strategy is totally inadequate for achieving a breakthrough in the socioeconomic development of the North Caucasus Federal District. And yet, In spite of the Strategy's glaring shortcomings, Russia's authorities have decided, instead of seriously reworking this strategic document with the help of civil society and expert communities, to simply introduce some transformations into the existing administrative structures. What was the reasoning behind that decision?

As a matter of fact, any governance system based on the principles of rigid centralization has its own internal logic, which is not necessarily conducive to maximum success in achieving the its proclaimed aims and objectives. And it was long ago, in the late Soviet period, that the following 'rule of bureaucracy' was formulated: in a centralized system, the authorities' first response to a failure in resolving one or other issue should be to create a new administrative body and vest it with responsibility to tackle it. However, in actual practice, such decisions often produce an effect

diametrically opposite to the designers' intentions – sometimes a new body begins instead to struggle for its place under the sun, and so embarks on a tug of war with the earlier-established administrative structures in an effort to appropriate their functions, and to compete with them for resources. Thus, the creation of new administrative and governance bodies frequently results not in an improvement of governance and administration, but in their worsening.

It seems that, in the case in point, we are faced with the same erroneous logic that is likely to produce the same lamentable results. The number of 'players' involved in the processes of governing and administering the North Caucasus Federal District has significantly increased. Moreover, it should be noted that the issue of allocation and distribution of resources, powers and status, as well as the issue of reconciling the various interests of the 'players' have so far remained unresolved. Besides, it is expected that the ongoing competition between the administrative structures directly in charge of affairs in the North Caucasus Federal District will be further exacerbated by inter-regional competition between the North Caucasus and the Crimea, for tourism development resources, etc.

The new governance system has given skeptics yet another reason to doubt its efficiency: the North Caucasus Development Ministry is vested with responsibility for discharging economic functions, while the Office of the Presidential Plenipotentiary for the North Caucasus – with that for discharging law enforcement functions. Most unfortunately, it can hardly be expected that this tandem will work smoothly and effectively, because in the North Caucasus economic and law-enforcement issues are closely intertwined and therefore cannot be treated separately. In order to be implemented, the task of attracting investors (especially into the recreational sector) and the subsequent task of attracting tourists, in order to be accomplished, do not require either large-scale law enforcement operations or an increase in the RF military presence in the North Caucasus. The only thing that matters is to create effective mechanisms for achieving civil peace and to organize dialogue between the social forces currently at loggerheads with each other. It is far from clear what institution within the new system will be able to perform this function – for the simple reason that it cannot be classed with either 'economic' or 'law-enforcement' functions. Unless clear responsibility for performing this function is definitely allocated to one or other institution, no serious progress will likely be achieved in either direction, and everything will end up in mutual recriminations about the failure to achieve the desired results.

It is reasonable to assume that the North Caucasus is suffering not from a lack of centralized administra-

tive structures, but from a lack of effective institutions capable of organizing dialogue and ensuring the resolution of conflicts, including those arising from municipal boundary disputes. It is noteworthy that in recent months, the authorities have abjectly failed to resolve or alleviate any major municipal boundary conflicts. Moreover, the authorities do not have any 'roadmaps' for resolving these conflicts, and it is not clear whether or not such maps, taking into account the views of all conflicting parties, can be developed in the foreseeable future. At the same time, in the spring of 2014, representatives of the various regional authorities of the North Caucasus made a number of statements concerning the conflict situations in their republics. They promised to rapidly resolve those conflicts but failed to specify the means for achieving that goal.

The current situation can be illustrated by the issue of restoring the Aukhovskiy raion of Dagestan. Populated by the Akins (Dagestan Chechens), the raion was liquidated in 1944 when its Chechen population was deported. The territory of the former Aukhovskiy raion was repopulated by the Laks, forcibly resettled for that purpose from their mountain villages. The raion was renamed Novolakskiy (New Lak). In June 1991, the 3rd Congress of Dagestan People Deputies passed a resolution that the Laks should be resettled from Novolakskiy raion in a region north of Makhachkala and Aukhovskiy raion be restored as a territorial unit with a predominantly Chechen population. The resettlement of the Laks has not been completed (because of continuous delays in providing them with housing at their new place of settlement). As a consequence, the resettlement of the Chechens has never been completed, either, and so Aukhovskiy raion is not restored. The Dagestan authorities repeatedly gave new deadlines for the resettlement of the Laks and for the restoration of Aukhovskiy raion. All those deadlines came and went, and nothing happened. In March 2014, Head of Dagestan Ramazan Abdulatipov announced that Aukhovskiy raion would be restored within the next three years, thus making 2017 the effective date for completing the whole resettlement process¹.

However, as far as the restoration of Aukhovskiy raion is concerned, its timing is by no means the only headache for the Dagestan authorities. The second headache is the issue as to the raion's boundaries. There are two villages, Leninaul and Kalinaul (with an aggregate population of about 12 thousand) which, prior to 1944, were part of Aukhovskiy raion. Whether or not they should be incorporated into that raion once

1 Glava Dagestana obsudil s chechentsami-Akintsami voprosy vosstanovleniia Aukhovskogo raiona [The Head of Dagestan and Akin Chechens Representatives Discuss the Issues of Restoring Aukhovskiy Raion]. 5 May 2014. <http://www.yuga.ru/news/324576/>

again causes a lot of controversy. In 1944, these two villages were included not in Novolaksky raion, but in the neighboring Kazbek raion, and have remained incorporated in it ever since. Having returned from the place of their deportation, the Chechens immediately settled in Leninaul and Kalininaul, and therefore the current problem of Chechen resettlement faced by Novolaksky raion does not extend to these two villages. The fly in the ointment is that the Chechens' neighbors in Leninaul and Kalininaul are not Laks but Avars, who resettled there in 1944 from nearby villages. At present, the two ethnic communities represented in Leninaul and Kalininaul are at loggerheads with one another concerning the future of their villages: the Avars want them to remain part of Kazbek raion, while the Chechens insist that the villages should be handed over to Auksky raion.

The most disturbing feature of this conflict is the almost total absence of any dialogue mechanisms capable of helping the two ethnic communities to reach a compromise solution. The latest attempt of the Dagestan authorities to organize some sort of discussion between representatives of the two communities dates back to March 2012 (when the former head of Dagestan, Magomedislam Magomedov, was still in power)¹. At present, the issue of organizing such a dialogue belongs to the competence of the Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Commission of the Republic of Dagestan, created in 2013 by the head of the republic, Ramazan Abdulatipov, for the purpose of resolving such disputes. However, according to residents of Leninaul and Kalininaul, the Commission has been totally inactive with regard to the controversy flaring up in these two villages. Although activists from both ethnic groups can freely express their preferences regarding the administrative future of their villages (for example, at mass rallies, in the press, etc.), they do not have a venue for discussing and reconciling their disagreements. As a result, incessant and vociferous repetition of the same mantra only exacerbates the already tense situation in the villages.

It should be noted that the aforesaid situation cannot be explained solely by the uniqueness of inter-communal relations in these two villages. To a large

extent, the current impasse is caused by the absence of dialogue mechanisms at the regional level, as the following circumstances clearly indicate.

1. The residents of the two villages, when interviewed by us, emphasized that in any subsequent debate as to the future of those villages, not only the members of their ethnic communities, but also representatives of regional self-government bodies and the Dagestan Republic's administrative structures must necessarily take part. At the same time, regional and municipal officials – who have hitherto stood aloof from the aforesaid conflict – are displaying no signs that they indeed may be willing to become moderators-mediators in such debates, or even to participate in them;

2. The region is also plagued by a number of inter-village and even inter-raion conflicts, which center around municipal boundaries and land-use rights. Such disputes are best exemplified by the conflict over the expensive agricultural lands in the Karaman area in the northern suburb of Makhachkala, raging between a group of Kumyck activists and the Laks being resettled to this area from Novolaksky raion. This conflict, which has never been an 'intra-village' one, can be resolved only with the participation of the republic's authorities, because some of the contested land is owned by the Dagestan Republic. However, nothing is being done in order to resolve the conflict by means of negotiations. Moreover, in the first half-year of 2014, Dagestan's law enforcers visibly increased pressure on the leaders of Kumyck protesters, going as far as arresting some of them².

As indicated by the course of events in the North Caucasus during recent months, conflicts concerning land-use rights and administrative-territorial division demonstrate a trend toward long-lasting confrontation. It is unlikely that the authorities are willingly 'freezing' such conflicts by conscientiously postponing their resolution. Much more likely, the officials responsible for the republic's policy concerning these conflicts are simply not competent enough to organize a fully-fledged dialogue on the aforesaid controversies. Therefore we believe that the number one priority for the North Caucasus in the next few years will be radical improvement of the competence of its officialdom. ●

1 Ne vspukhnet li novyi meznatsional'nyi konflikt? [Is There a Danger of a New Ethnic Conflict Flaring Up?]. Novoe Delo [The New Cause]. 14 April 2012. http://www.arhiv.ndelo.ru/one_stat.php?id=6740.

2 <http://regnum.ru/news/1802990.html>;
<http://regnum.ru/news/1774372.html>