

## THE ALLOCATION OF FEDERAL FUNDING TO MEASURES DESIGNED TO SETTLE CONFLICTS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: THE CONDITIONS FOR ITS EFFICACY

K.Kazenin

*The necessity to optimize the federal budget expenditure targets for 2015, as declared by Russia's authorities, has put to the fore, among other things, also the issue of government target programs for the development of Russian regions, including the regions of the North Caucasus, and the actual effectiveness of those programs. As far as the North Caucasus republics are concerned, the effectiveness and feasibility of federal budget allocations in the past was reviewed predominantly in the framework of investment projects, where the federal government granted its guarantees against loans or allocated funding to infrastructure development ventures. However, in addition to these spending items, the North Caucasus imposes a significant burden on the federal budget in terms of costs associated with the consequences of ethnic conflicts. In view of the current economic situation it appears especially important to optimize the plan of measures designed to deal with these consequences, to estimate their relative importance and order of priority, and to select only those that are truly needed, so as to eliminate any unnecessary expenditures. Besides, the government must ensure that the measures designed to resolve the current conflicts in the North Caucasus should not give boost to controversies in the conflict zones – in other words, have the effect of attempts to put out a fire with gasoline (as it has already happened many times in the North Caucasus).*

In this connection, we are going to look at one of the most noticeable conflict sites in the North Caucasus – the so-called 'Novolaksky conflict' in Dagestan. That conflict flared up as early as in the last years of the Soviet era, and it has not yet been resolved. First, we are going to provide the reader with a gist of the events that had initially given rise to that conflict, and a list of measures undertaken so far with the purpose to settle it. The primary cause of the conflict was the deportation of the Chechen people in 1944. By the time of deportation, these were some areas in Dagestan predominantly settled by Chechens communities. For example, there was an administrative entity – Aukhovsky District, which was populated in the main by Chechens; it bordered on the city of Khasavyurt and the territory of the then Chechen–Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Shortly after the deportation of the Chechens, that district was abolished as a territorial entity. The bulk of its territory was incorporated in the newly created Novolaksky District, which still exists today. In 1944, the inhabitants of some thirty mountain Dagestan villages – ethnic Laks – were forcibly resettled in the district. When Chechens began to return from exile in 1957, the Soviet authorities did not allow them to settle in Novolaksky District – seemingly in order to prevent the territory's overpopulation and the resulting conflicts over the possession of land. However, in the *perestroika* years, Dagestan's Chechens once again raised the issue of reinstating their ancient right to their land and restoring the abolished Aukhovsky District. This move triggered a chain of conflict situa-

tion and even armed clashes, after which a special program was launched with the purpose of providing a solution to the Novolaksky conflict. This program, whose core provisions were incorporated into the resolutions of the Third Congress of People's Deputies of Dagestan in June 1991, envisages the resettlement of Laks from Novolaksky District into the earmarked area in close vicinity of Dagestan's capital city of Makhachkala, where budget-funded construction projects are underway to provide each Lak family with a separate house. In 2014, the population of Novolaksky District (including the newly resettled Laks) numbered a total of 31,468 people. After the Lak resettlement project is completed, Aukhovsky District, in accordance with decisions of the Third Congress of People's Deputies of Dagestan, must be restored.

The government program envisaging resettlement of Laks and restoration of Aukhovsky District is still in progress. According to data released by the government of the Republic of Dagestan, over the period 1992–2013 a total of Rb 7.5bn was allocated to the resettlement measures. As of the spring of 2013, a total of 2,929 houses had been erected for Laks, seven school buildings, and public healthcare facilities. According to unofficial estimates of Dagestan's authorities, at present they need approximately 1,500 residential houses. The resettlement activities are currently being funded in the framework of the federal target program 'The South of Russia (2014–2020)', and the amount of relevant expenditures is being regularly adjusted.

The results of our field study conducted in Dagestan over the period of November – December 2014 have provided some grounds for the conclusion that, for the Novolaksky conflict to be properly resolved, it will not be sufficient to only allocate budget funding to housing construction and infrastructure projects in the areas designated for the resettlement of Laks. The conflict, which has been periodically escalating in the south of Russia with strong political reverberations and so, in case of negative developments, can pose a menace to ethnic peace in Dagestan at large, can only be ultimately resolved on the basis of some special measures designed to properly regulate the situation in the conflict zone.

First. It is necessary, as an urgent measure, to properly regulate the procedure for compiling lists of the Lak families in need of houses in their resettlement areas. That procedure is actually established by special acts issued by the government of the Republic of Dagestan. However, the constant addition of new names to those lists not only entails new budget expenditures, but also gives rise to a new threat of destabilization in Novolaksky District. Thus, for example, representatives of the Chechen population argue that new names are sometimes added to the resettlement lists as a result of corrupt deals, and that the resettlement process is being artificially delayed so as the emergence of new young resettler families can be used as a reason for the construction of some additional houses in the resettlement area (in the interests of the construction contractors). Such declarations – be they based on true or false facts – represent a serious threat to stability in the conflict zone. It is necessary to revise the procedure for compiling resettler lists so as to make it much more transparent for all the concerned parties. Besides, it would be worthwhile for the Dagestan regional authorities in charge of the resettlement process to set a deadline, after which no new lists can be compiled.

Second. The terms on which the resettling Laks must vacate their houses in the territory of the future Aukhovsky District must be stipulated much more clearly in the acts of the government of Dagestan. At present, in the villages to be vacated by Laks, disputes often arise as to whether one or other Lak family must indeed vacate their house – that is, whether all the necessary conditions for their resettlement in the new territory have already been created. Evidently, this is fertile ground for conflicts. Controversies will by no means disappear after the houses for Lak resettlers have been built.

Third. Consultations are needed, with the participation of all the parties to the conflict, as to the actual

boundaries of the future Aukhovsky District. This issue has also given rise to some serious controversies. If these are not resolved, the Lak resettlement program alone will fail to resolve the conflict. Moreover, once the resettlement is over, it may give rise to even more tension. It should be borne in mind that the territory of Novolaksky District, which is currently being ‘vacated’ for the resettlement of Chechens, does not precisely fall within the boundaries of Aukhovsky District, as it existed as of the moment of its abolition in 1944. In fact, it included two large villages that later were not included in Novolaksky District – Leninaul (population of 8,340, according to the 2010 All-Russian Census) and Kalininaul (population of 4,531). Currently, 65% of the population of these two villages are Avars, and 35% are Chechens. The future of the two villages is being hotly disputed by activists representing these two ethnic groups. The idea of including these villages into Aukhovsky District, where Chechens are in majority, is being criticized by Avar activists. Our observations have led to the conclusion that the two villages in question are currently Dagestan’s leaders in conflict-mongering. Once the resettlement of Laks is successfully completed, the unresolved issue of the future destiny of Leninaul and Kalininaul will effectively level down the positive effect of the federal budget funding allocated to the construction project, because a new conflict issue will emerge in connection with the restoration of Aukhovsky District. This negative course of events should be prevented by urgent measures designed to promote a dialogue in these two villages, with a view towards reaching a compromise as to their future status.

The example of the Novolaksky conflict has graphically demonstrated that federal funding alone, when allocated to resettlement programs in the framework of measures designed to eliminate the negative consequences of conflicts in the North Caucasus without being backed by some other measures, may fail to yield the desired results. Firstly, as we have already seen, some overlooked components of the resettlement process may trigger further tension in the conflict zone. Secondly, resettlement as a method of resolving a conflict may bring positive results only if the planned changes in administrative and territorial division are not fraught with some new conflict. The allocation of money from the federal budget to the implementation of measures designed to settle conflicts in the North Caucasus will be feasible only on condition that the measures in question would not give rise to new conflicts, and their implementation would not create fertile ground for further inter-ethnic and communal tensions. ●