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CENTRAL STATE VS REGIONAL AUTONOMY - POLITICAL ELITE'S ACTION STRATEGY

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Abstract

The role of the autonomous institutions is significant in the elaboration of the specific strategies conducive for the political elite of either regional autonomy or central state to achieve their territorial, political and economic goals. Functional autonomous institutions enable the political elite to mobilize its ethnic group and radicalize demands. Rational assessment of the geographic location, instrumentalization of primordial markers (focus on historical memory) and constructivist ascriptions along with structural situation in and out of both, the autonomy and central state defines contemplated ethnic politics with far-going consequences of the both, central state and autonomy. Autonomy's political elite activates primordial ascriptions, as well as, constructionist attitudes, considers geographic location to mobilize ethnic followers, press claims for secession and influence central authority to upgrade autonomous status through negotiations or violent confrontation. The Central state political elite's decision about action strategy selection depends on the structure of situation inside and outside of the country. While operationalizing selected strategy central administration applies primordial and constructivist approaches to impact local authority's decision-making process. Two autonomous republics of the Russian Federation, Tatarstan and Chechnya, are explored in the first decade after collapse of the Soviet Union to test theoretically identified factors impacting

formation of ethnic politics and action strategies in the central state and autonomy. The methods' triangulation (process-tracing method, discourse analysis of the official document and public speeches and semi-structured interviewing) was utilized to validate the research findings. On its way to upgrade autonomous status, Tatarstan built civic nationalism guaranteeing peaceful coexistence of the ethnic groups. Chechnya's oppressive historic experience intensified rigid ethnic politics leading to protracted ethnic confrontation.

Keywords: Ethnic Conflict, Autonomy, Political Elite, Historical Memory, Action Strategies, Civic and Ethnic Nationalism.

1. Introduction

Academic scholars studying the factors of secessionism states that when the countries with plural ethnic cleavages obtain independence after historical junctures like decolonization, collapse of the empire, revolutions, regime change, interstate wars, etc. and declare transition to democracy (Treisman 1997), they face a frightful challenge - activation of the ethnic movements straight away. Lack of communication, in other words, asymmetry of information, between the central state and regional autonomy aggravates interethnic relations. On top of it, the process of democratization plays a role of the powerful trigger to commanded secessionist activities. A minority perceives democratic reforms which at least meant conduction of the popular elections as an additional instrument of oppression at hands of politically dominated ethnic group (Rabushka, Shapsle 1971) and at the same time deprives other ethnic cleavages from the politico-economic and social life (Dutter 1990).

The end of the Soviet Union, an eminent historical juncture, gave a strong impetus to a new wave of ethnic self-determination in the former Soviet Republics (Zurcher 2007). The newly-formed governments were not ready to handle the threat of separatism coming from the titular ethnic groups in the autonomous units.

The Russian Federation (RF) was not an exception. The process of self-determination of the ethnic minorities in the RF has gone through differently in the distinct autonomous units. The outcomes were drastically dissimilar, as well. Scholarship indicates that the factors influencing initiation of the nationalistic movements were diverse. The present paper intends to set apart the reasons having an impact over the political elite's decision-making processes, namely, the selection of the specific action strategies by the autonomous leadership and reaction tactic-repertoire of the central state authority. Exploring the action dynamics in Russia's two autonomies, Tatarstan and Chechnya, and elite relationship of central state and autonomous republics in 1990s and 2000s is the purpose of the conducted comparative case study analysis. Both autonomous entities pressed claims for independence

straight after dismantling of the USSR. Although, the regional leaders exploited unlike action strategies and consequently, reached different outcomes: Tatarstan's peaceful actions brought back the lost autonomous status with full-fledged package of the politico-economic and social rights. Contrary to the Volga region, Chechnya, on its way to obtain complete sovereignty, entered severe military confrontation with the central authority. The bloody conflict prolonged almost a decade and ended with the significant civilian casualties along with the destruction of military capabilities on both sides (Graney 2009).

The spectrum of the reasons inspiring ethnic groups to secede is broad and multicolored. Solving ethnic identity confrontation with peaceful negotiations is a tough task. Anticipated shift in *status quo* increases autonomy's residents' fear of insecurity (Snyder 1985, Jay 1989, Rothchild, Hartzell 1999), lowering sovereignty, infringing the borders, worsening the group's living standard, and so on. Among the leading factors of the future confrontation between the central state and autonomy are - geographic location, historical memory/experience, political leaders, the level of economic development, education, etc.

Two major schools of thought, primordial and constructivist, attempt to identify the causes of inter-ethnic contestation. Primordialism accentuates the characteristics of the distinct ethnic group markers, formed by the same type of living environment, culture, i.e. language and/or religion, rites or rituals, traditions, etc. Grounded on them, the group develops the institutional structure to conduct collective actions (Hall 1979) on the territory that historically belongs to the particular ethnic minority (Rothchild 1981, Spicer 1971). A collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive culture, linkage with the territory, and sense of solidarity are six markers (Smith 1991) that enable the group to set their own institutions (Geertz 1963, Shils 1957) for easy mobilization to conduct successful secessionism.

The constructivists reject the notion of the ascribed attributes. Barth (1998) applies ethnic boundary instead of the cultural features assigned to the group. Nigel (1994, pp.152, 153) thinks that ethnic identities are "constructed out of material of language, religion, culture, appearance of regionality" and the meaning of "particular distinct boundaries are constantly negotiated, revised and revitalized". Dunn and Fraser (1996) suggest replacement of *ethnie* by the linguistic and/or religious communities.

Other scholarships demonstrate controversial findings. Roeder (1995) and Gurr (1993) consider that educated, economically or politically advanced groups are more inclined to conduct separatist actions (Gurr 1993). Out of advanced and backward groups (Horowitz 2001), the latter is more motivated to conduct rapid mobilization, though Hechter (1978) believes that the backwards are more prone to separate and form their own state. According to Melson and Wolpe (1970) nonexistence

of crosscutting cleavages is a prerequisite for emergence of the communal nationalism. For Rothchild (1981) any event that sharpens ethnic division and stimulates structuring of the inequality on the ethnic grounds works against peaceful co-development of the multi-ethnic communities.

An autonomy possessed powerful instrument to initiate and then promote secessionist activities. Its functional politico-economic along with social institutions create strong grounds for *ethnie* to overcome collective action dilemma and consolidate around the idea of separation (Cornell 2002). Sharing border with the adjacent kin state polarizes geographically concentrated group's relationships with the center authority in the host state (Posen 1993, Weidemann 1991, Toft 2003, Ceredman, Gerardin 2007; Fearon, et al. 2007). The minority group expects backing from the kin state. The support of the kin in the neighboring state can take various forms. It is to be tacit – diplomatic and/or financial, or military - training of the paramilitaries, granting arms and even intervene forcefully when other means does not work sufficiently (Carment, James 1996).

The role of political leaders in initiation of the conflict is significant, as they are able to instrumentalise the primordialist markers to articulate group demands. For the minority they are the carriers of the group's collective and historical memory (Toft 2003). The elite defines the existential issues of the ethnic cleavage (Dutter 1990), emphasizes the historical events, (ruthless discrimination of the whole nation/*ethnie* (Hale 2000), mass deportation, ethnic cleansing, genocide, etc.) while pressing the claims of secession or demands to upgrade the status (Rabushka, Shapsle 1971, Tilly 1998).

In the present research I argue, that the political elite behavior is decisive in initiation, promotion and endurance of the ethnic confrontation. The peaceful resolution of protracted conflict, peace-making and peace-building processes or intensification of the conflict are in hand of the political leadership either of the center or autonomy. When the right moment for successful secession comes, the political elite of the autonomy applies both, ethnic group's primordial ascriptions or constructionist attitudes, to declare extreme demands aiming at least to make central authority step back and upgrade political and/or economic rights through negotiations. In case the peaceful strategy does not work the elite radicalizes demands. Now their goal is to achieve complete sovereignty even through violent means. As a response, the center either secedes and launches the process of negotiation or starts repression/military operation against the disobedient region. "The structure of situation" (Kaufman 1996) inside and outside of the central state or regional autonomy impacts political elite's decision, as well.

To summarize, the research is focused on three major factors: (a) geographic location (sharing border with another state vs heartland location), (b) introduction of the constructivist ascriptions based on primordial markers (in most of the cases historical memory formed during

historical development of the major ethnic groups in the distinct region) or vice versa constructivist features are utilized to build collective memory based on specific historical moments sensitive for the ethnic group, and (c) the structural situation in and out of the state or autonomy to demonstrate how they affect political elite's decision-making processes. The comparative case study method traces dynamics of the events in two autonomous republics of the RF from early 1990s to 2007. For achieving reliable and solid findings of the research I exploited triangulation or "the combination of the methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (Denzin 1978, 291). Application of several methods increases validity of the research outcomes. One of the methods was semi-structured interview. Twentyfive (Chechen, Russian and Tatar) respondents were recorded from 2020 to 2022. Because of Covid -19 and the precautious attitudes of the interviewees, especially Chechens, the interviews were conducted via WhatsApp. All the Chechen interviewees are above 50 with college education. The focus was made on those who witnessed the processes that underwent in Chechnya during the researched period. Among Chechen respondents were the former head of militia of Grozny, the former Member of Parliament, the wife of the former minister, etc. All the Chechen respondents live in Europe. It made easier to apply snowballing technique to find new interviewees. The Russian and Tatar respondents represent academic field relevant to the research. The research methodology has a limitation related with physical security of the respondents. All the interviewees preferred to stay anonymous (Russian citizens explained it by introduced Foreign Agents Law¹ and Chechens by the Kadirov regime haunting non-supporters even abroad). Along with interview, the method of process-tracing was applied to demonstrate the path these autonomies passed since Russian occupation, Soviet period and after collapse of the USSR. The constitution of Tatarstan (and other documents) and speeches of the political leaders were interpreted (discourse analysis) to show what steps were made to achieve the goal.

The strategy repertoire of the autonomy's political authority has been alternating in accordance to the central authority's actions. Process-tracing of the regional elite behavior and reaction of the center demonstrates what action strategy is selected by the elite. The findings validate that all three factors determine the action plan of the political elite to reach the set goal. In case of Tatarstan political establishment had chosen moderate though persistent strategy based on the republic's geographic location (heartland of the Russian state); effective application of both primordial and constructivist approaches to emphasize two major ethnic groups' peaceful historical development, on

¹ Federal Law No.121-FZ of 20 July. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/russian-federation-%E2%80%93-amended-definition-%E2%80%9Cpolitical-activity%E2%80%9D-adopted-first-reading> (accessed date 27.03.2023)

one hand and on the other hand, promotion of Tatar linguistic, religious and educational institutions for solidification of the Tatar people. Tatar regional political elite did not forget to take into account structural situation domestically (war in Chechnya) and Yeltsin's desire to maintain his image of democratic ruler in eyes of Western partners. Consequently, the central authority's response was mild that led to peaceful negotiations and bilateral treatment. Unlike Tatarstan, Chechen leadership decided to utilize rigid action plan that stayed immutable through the whole time period from early 90s to 2007. For Kremlin geographic location (sharing border with Georgia) of this North Caucasian republic unconditionally was viewed as a huge threat for the state's security. Instrumentalizing only aggressive means to conquer Chechnya made impossible to create favorable environment for peaceful coexistence of the Chechen people and the Russian ethnic. Historical memory of the locals was full of the moments of oppression, repression and deportation. It was easy for the new Chechen political elite to apply primordial markers to strengthen hatred against the Russians and use mass media to construct collective memory acceptable for the Chechen majority. Internally, structural situation was not conducive for this North Caucasian republic – creation of the precedent of separation would launch demonstration effect for the other neighboring republics and not only; externally, by utilizing state-controlled media Kremlin transformed Chechen fighters for freedom into terrorists and bandits to prove to the west that violence against Chechnya is necessary to eliminate the source of the state insecurity.

2. Case Study - Tatarstan

Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan, capital city of Tatarstan, in 16th century and eliminated Tatarstan statehood (Rorlich 1999). With conquer of the Ural and part of Siberia, Tatarstan became a heartland of Russian Empire (Rashitov 2001). Since then, the Russian rulers tried to convert ethnic Tatars to Christianity and russify them. The Kremlin limited the Tatar economic activity in favor of Russian Christians. Despite enduring Russian repressive machine the Tatar majority kept their religion. The Tatars for a long time perceived Russia as a colonizer because of coercive attempts to integrate Tatars and Russian new settlers (Zverev 2002).

Gradual immigration of Russian *ethnie* to the Tatarland intensified the Tatars' fear of total assimilation. Despite it, the process of co-development of the ethnic groups under strong Russian rule carried on smoothly (Benningsen, Broxup 1983). The Tatar primordialist perceptions revived in 1920s when the Bolsheviks came to the power. New political regime promised the promotion of self-determination of the ethnic minorities in the Soviet empire. The Bolshevik Kremlin granted to the Tatarland the status of the autonomous republic (Khakimov 1996). However, with consolidation of

Stalin's totalitarian regime the rights of many autonomies were downgraded or depleted. By 1937, the Tatars lost partial sovereignty (Williams 2011). The collapse of the Soviet Union became *casus belli* to renew the claims to bring back Tatarstan's full-fledged autonomy.

Shaimiev² instrumentalised a mixture of primordial and constructivist features while pursuing his goal – not only returning lost status but upgrading it as well. Autonomy's ethnic composition³, common history, and peaceful co-development of Tatars and Russians were utilized in the process of negotiations with the center. Religious difference did not undermine amicable coexistence of these ethnic groups. During the centuries of co-development, The Russian and Tatar cultures sufficiently integrated with each other (Williams 2011). At the same time, Tatarstan authority launched formation and further strengthening of the Tatar nationalistic organization, though they were inclusive for all the ethnic groups. Among them was the Multiethnic Congress of the Peoples of Tatarstan founded to reinforce centuries-long affable ethnic interaction and constructive dialogue between different cleavages (Williams 2011). The Tatar political elite understood that re-cultivation of the Tatar ethnicity needed changes on a legislative level. In 1992, a new Tatar constitution declared two official state languages – Tatar and Russian. The double citizenship, Russian and Tatar⁴, was adopted for all the residents of the region. The autonomous governmental programs promoting Tatar culture did not aim downgrading the value or development of other ethnic groups: Russian, Chuvash, Mari or Udmurt⁵ (Sharafutdinova 2000, Musina, 1996). The regional authority intended to build strong inter-ethnic institutions as a fundament for internal political stability, economic development, simultaneously taking away the instrument of pressure from the central administration. The Tatar-Russian friendly relations should have had decisive role in the lengthy negotiations. Pursuing moderate nationalistic politics in any institution either politico-economic or social would be conducive for the peaceful though persistent bargaining with the host state authority (Hanauer 1996). Shaimiev's government was aware that affable inter-ethnic ties were a solid defense against anticipated oppression from Moscow, which often utilized coercive measures against the disobedient subjects. Aftermath, the Kremlin justified applied repressive actions by the pretext that Russia always protected its ethnic kin in and out of the state (Carment, James 1996).

The central state attempted to compel the local authority and step back. Gorbachev⁶ forced Tatarstan administration to sign Gorbachev's union treaty in 1991 (Graney 2009). In response,

² The Head of Tatarstan from 1991 to 2010

³ According to last census (2010) out of 3.7 million people living on the territory of Tatarstan Tatars make 52.9%, Russians – 39.5%, Chuvashes - 3.3, and the rest 4.2% are representatives of other ethnic groups (Williams 2011).

⁴ The constitution of Tatarstan Republic, <http://1997-2011.tatarstan.ru/const002.html> (data)

⁵ <http://www.reworld.org/docid/469f38d434.html> (data)

⁶ General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Shaimiev led the boycott against Moscow: the majority of population refused to participate in Russia's presidential election held the same year. Gorbachev's resignation did not change the situation. The Kremlin perceived Tatarstan self-determination as a threat for Russia's national security and integrity (Broxup 1996). The prospect of secession of industrially well-developed autonomy could have brought harmful demonstration effect internally and trigger the secessionist movements in another autonomous units of the RF (Bahry 2005). The central authority anticipated territorial disintegration along with economic collapse countrywide (Graney 2009). Externally, the weakening image of once superpower, Russia, faced inevitable loss of international influence. The Kremlin's solution was simple - Yeltsin⁷ ordered to replace Shaimiev by a pro-Kremlin successor (Bahry 2005). The massive demonstrations in Kazan were a reaction to Moscow's decision. Tatar leaders proclaimed a new demand - full independence of the Volga region. The altered situation made Russian political elite rethink repressive strategy and hold back (Zverev 2002). The RF's central authority concede. It strengthened Tatar nationalists' awareness that achieving initial demand, upgrading autonomous status, is realistic.

The Tatar politicians grounded their calculus on the moderate bargaining strategy. They reckoned the new reality - emergence of the unprecedented chance for the region rich with natural resources and industrial capabilities to broaden its politico-economic rights (Hanauer 1996), thus the messages sent to the center were well-reasoned and far from radicalization [1], [2].

The successful referendum on the status of the Volga region was a clear evidence that Despite ethnic belonging the majority of population of the Tatarstan backed the regional elite and the idea of independence (81% turnout, 64% - "yes" to the sovereignty (Hughes 2001, Graney 2009)). The outcome of the referendum solidified the Tatar leadership standing. The Kremlin lost the local Russians' support in the region. It was the right moment for Shaimiev to press claims for upgrading autonomous status again. He made the Kremlin sign a special bilateral agreement (Sharafutdinova 2000) and widen autonomous rights of Tatarstan [4].

Moscow's deep engagement in the military confrontation (domestic structural situation) with Chechnya was additional trump card for Shaimiev. He wisely pondered that initiation of a new violent conflict could have caused unforeseen problems for the Kremlin [2], [5]. The calculus proved to be correct - Russian authority reconsidered the state of affairs with Tatarstan and decided to continue negotiation with the local political elite (Sharafutdinova 2000). At the end of the day, the bargaining outcomes were profitable for the both parties: Tatarstan upgraded its status; peaceful ending of the negotiations benefited Moscow as well. Yeltsin's rating increased [2], [6] and the reaction of the

⁷ The first democratically elected president of the RF.

international community on the Kremlin nonviolent strategy was positive. It strengthened Yeltsin's image as a democratic ruler of new Russia (Matsuzato 2007) [2], [6].

In sum, the Tatarstan case demonstrates that the autonomous political elite instrumentalised primordial and constructivist approaches to achieve the goal. Namely, the constructivist attitude was applied during the negotiations. Prior to signing bilateral agreement, the Tatar political leadership thoroughly assessed all favorable features: geographic location, ethnic composition, and historically well-developed relationship between ethnic groups in the region. They commenced an effective nationalistic politics for building sub-state institutions and promoting "a civic conception of nationalism rather than ethnic conception" (Frombgen 1999) by (a) productive functioning of interethnic institutions conducive to initiate deliberation on any contradictive issue with participation of all interested parties; and (b) formation of the functional government comprised with the dominant titular groups along with the representatives of other ethnic minorities to govern multicultural civic nationalistic society in accordance to the preferences of every resident of the sub-state unit. At the same time, the Tatar elite reconstructed nationalistic sentiments (primordial markers) and strengthened Tatars position in the region. Shaimiev's strategy, grounded on precise calculus of the structural situation, geographic location and circulative instrumentalization of primordial and constructivist attitudes, became a guarantee of the successful negotiations (Zverev 2002).

3. Case study – Chechnya

Chechnya, another autonomous republic with secessionist ambition, is located in the North Caucasus at the southern border of the Russian Federation. Peter the Great started the first military campaigns to conquer Chechnya. Catharine the Great continued armed operations aggressively (Dunlop 1998). The process of conquest was long and bloody. The central state's repressive policy in the disobedient Caucasian region did not leave space for peaceful development of two distinct *ethnies* – the local Chechens and Russian newcomers. Several deportation campaigns of Chechens almost depopulated the region [7]. It was a "genocide through forced exodus" (Broxup 1992). Stalin's deportation policy⁸ in 1940's gradually altered ethnic composition of the region (Zurcher 2007). By the moment, when the Soviet Empire dismantled, all activities, either politico-economic or societal, were split into "Russian" and "national"/local [8], [9]. The political offices always belonged to the Russians. The Chechens were appointed only on the "secondary" positions. Economically rich sectors – oil industry, machinery and infrastructural projects usually hired Russians [10]. The locals were

⁸ Selivanova M.O. 2013. "Deportatsiya CheChentsev v 1944 Godu: Genotsid ili Mera Nakazaniya Ikh Stalinskim Rejhimom? Nauchno-Izdateckii Tsentr "Sotsiosfera"

majorly employed in the agricultural sector with lower wages (Dunlop 1998). During the Soviet times, the Chechens were never a part of political or economic elite of the autonomy [11], contrary to Tatarstan where the ruling elite was bi-ethnic [12]. On top, religion that never obstruct Tatar-Russian coexistence played crucial role in mobilizing Chechens against Russians. The Caucasian locals always had been viewed their land as an “internal colony” (Gammer 1994). The aggregated hatred permeated every layer of ethnically/linguistically and religiously divided society in Chechnya (Lieven 1998).

In early 1990s weakening of the central state institutions became a signal to Chechen nationalists. Dudayev⁹ unanimously declared independence of Chechnya and adopted a new name for the republic – Chechen republic of Ichkeria (Hill 1995). The reaction of the Kremlin was mild, even tentative. Yeltsin avowed: “...to give as much freedom, as they can swallow”¹⁰. Massive immigration of the Russians due to the Chechen nationalistic rhetoric and anti-Russian propaganda [9] and two Chechen wars changed ethnic landscape: in 1989 Chechens made 66% of the total population and Russians 24%; by 2002 – number of Chechens increased up to 93% (though total amount of Chechens decreased) (Soldatova 1993, Zurcher 2007). Plenty of the Russians fled Chechnya because of insecure environment [2], [10] and the Russian populace reduced to 3.4% (Evangelista 2002).

Social interactions between Chechens and Russians never were good. Historical memory of the persecutions of the “mountaineers” (Dunlop 1998) had been spoiling interethnic relations. For the Chechens the Russians were occupants and oppressors. For the Russian dwellers locals were brutal, uneducated and unreliable. The forceful russification during Tsarist Russia which continued in Soviet period as well advanced with demonstration of the Russian culture supremacy aiming to devalue Chechen language, religion, traditions, etc. (Broxup 1992). In 1990s the Kremlin launched Chechen demonization campaign using the state-controlled mass media [13]. The Chechens got the new labels – “the nation of bandits” (Russell 2005), ungrateful, ignorant, barbarous tribe (Zurcher 2007). Simultaneously, the Moscow started the first phase of its action plan aiming worsening Chechnya’s economic condition¹¹. The center exploited economy as an effective leverage to coerce the Chechen political elite disregarding the autonomy’s powerholders’ will to keep the economic ties with the Russia rest [14], [9]. The center intended to demonstrate impotence of the Chechen authority¹² on both - national and international level (Cornell 2001).

⁹ Russian military commander, later the first president of Chechnya.

¹⁰ “Beyond the Kremlin's Reach” <https://www.economist.com/node/15407883> (20.03.18)

¹¹ Vzglyad: Dzokhar Dudaev Ujhe v Podpoliye. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MpknqyB9g0&t=1567s> (10.11.2018)

¹²Dzokhar Dudaev, Interview 1995: O Rosii, O Rosizme, O Rashizme, O Budushchikh Boinakh. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7snMdDgn_OI&t=582s (30.10.2028)

Politically, the sovereign Chechen leadership rejected an idea of reconciliation with the centuries-age enemy, Russian post-soviet empire [15]. The Chechen government used to enunciate the radical nationalistic ideas as it was the request of the Chechen people [2], [9]. The atmosphere in the republic was uncertain and instable (Sharafutdinova 2000). The language of hostility was heard everywhere [2]. The Kremlin' rhetoric was full of hatred, as well [16]. The Russian mass media's aggressive propaganda targeted the dignity of Chechen people (Russell 2005).

After Dudayev's death, Chechen political elite profoundly fragmented. However, there was one sacred issue each Chechen faction unanimously agreed on - freeing Chechnya from Russian rule. Chechen nationalistic policy accumulated abhorrence towards the Russians. The Chechen *ethnie* along with its political elite did not differentiate oppressive Russian authority and regular Russian people [2], [6]. Both were perceived as an enemy that repressed, martyred and murdered the Chechens through centuries (Gammer 1994). Animosity nourished salience of the Chechen ethnic [9], [19].

The strategy repertoire the Russian authority utilized to coerce the Chechen elite and make it change the decisions comprised several alternating strategies [17]. For the Russian political elite announcement of Chechnya's independence automatically was perceived as a declaration of war against the Moscow (Evangelista 2002). The situation became tense when Chechens replaced the Russians in all administrative and managerial positions [15], [6], [13] though some Russian professionals were asked to stay [18], [17], [15] (interview with the head of Chechen militia). The Kremlin figured out that the process of deprivations of Russians from all politico-economic activities commenced. Simultaneously, on the whole territory of the republic the groups of the Chechen men started violent attacks on the Russian settlements (Nikolaev 1996) (some of the Chechen respondents believe that it was staged by KGB, [17], [18], [19], [24], [25]). The processes outside Chechnya were not conducive for the autonomy as well [2], [9], [10], [21]. By 1993, the official Moscow admitted that the shock therapy¹³ failed countrywide [2], [6], consequently, Yeltsin's political popularity significantly dropped (Hanson 1999). He decided to use military elite's backing to maintain his office and balance fractioned parliament (Reddaway 1994). Despite domestic problems and negative reactions from the West, Yeltsin attacked Grozny with a small group of special forces in 1992. The Chechens were prepared for the violent action from the Kremlin. They bought arms from the Soviet military forces based in Chechnya [17], [18], [24]. Soviet military traded weapons everywhere. And Chechnya was not an exception. This uncontrollable situation in the soviet armed forces enabled Dudayev to arm the Chechens [15], [17], [18] [24], [25] . With these paramilitaries, Dudayev was

¹³ Radical economic reforms in Russia.

able to counterattack Russia's special forces aiming to bring back Russia's authority in this part of Caucasus (1992) (Alekberov 1995:156). Next two year were peaceful. RF was too busy to unrest political stability in the former Soviet Republics. Despite the Kremlin's silence, Chechen authority had to handle another challenge - devastation of economy [13], [14], [22], [24]. It had to withstand the Moscow's attempts to use economic leverage to trigger collapse of economic situation I the region and worsen living condition of the Chechens that without doubt could bring about resentment of the population against Chechen authority. Grozny administration had no time and desire to construct civic nationalism. Historical memory of oppression and past glory of brave Chechen fighters were instrumentalized to strengthen Chechen ethnic nationalism [19], [23].

Tensed relations with the Chechen authority, conflictual atmosphere in the autonomy along with ethnic contentions in the other parts of the North Caucasus made Kremlin launch new phase of its action strategy. Even though, Yeltsin replaced his hawkish wording with the dovish rhetoric, he made a decision to reject Chechnya's declared independence under the pressure of the RF's military elite. In 1994 the first Chechen war started by 40, 000 Russian soldiers crossing the autonomy's border. Unexpectedly for the center, it was defeated. The failure of this military campaign made the Kremlin switch harsh violent strategy again and another phase in Russian-Chechen relationships begun [2], [9], [13], [14], 15].

Khasavyurt Accord (1996) wound up the first Russo-Chechen war¹⁴. The final version of the treaty was signed in Moscow (1997), though the agreement was violated shortly by the Kremlin and 2-year unstable peace ended. The summer of 1999 was another turning point in the Russia's military dynamics: the Kremlin's moderate strategy was again altered by the aggressive armed campaign. The second Chechen war erupted full scale: the heavy artillery shelling was followed by intervention of the Russian infantry (about 100 000 soldiers). This time the war advanced successfully for Moscow. Severe military campaign fully benefited, then Prime Minister, Putin – “a man from nowhere” (Zurcher 2007), a former assistant of Anatoli'i Sobchak¹⁵. In 4-weeks his political rating skyrocketed from 2% to 60%. The Second Chechen war turned a “new man into a bearer of hope” (Zurcher 2007) for the majority of the Russian citizens still suffering with the imperial nostalgia. Putin instrumentalized mass media to construct notorious image of the Chechen fighters calling them bandits, terrorists, and uneducated brutal mountaineers (Russell 2005). Since then, the Russian political elite had utilized media propaganda massively to downgrade the Chechen ethnos and turned

¹⁴ Podnisanie Khasavyurt Accord. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ob1CCnIHog> (12.13.2018)

¹⁵ A mayor of St. Petersburg from 1991 to 1996.

it into a scapegoat of all the difficulties Russia faced (interview with the Chechen journalist, data). It is a clear case demonstrating how efficiently constructivist approach can be instrumentalized on the domestic level (Russell 2005) and at the same time justifying violent actions against Chechen “criminals” in eyes of the democratic world.

In sum, Chechnya’s fierce fight for independence is a case of the violent strategy application. The decision to secede from the central state with armed means had not altered during the whole period of nationalistic struggle. The peaceful outcome of the tough bargaining seemed unconceivable. On one hand, the Chechen leaders expressed reluctance to reconcile from the very beginning and, on the other hand, the Russian elite refused to grant sovereignty to Chechnya without giving any thought. There was no common point to start negotiation. The research tested the puzzle by the processes that underwent in Chechnya. The Chechen political elite activated primordial marker, historical memory (“heroic Chechen fighters are undefeatable”, [13], [14], [19], [22]), to unite the Chechen ethnic group against the Russian oppressors. The same marker was instrumentalised in the constructivist way mostly in the official speeches to deepen hatred by both sides. Nationalistic mass media in Chechnya and central state-controlled mass propaganda played a crucial role in circulating the abhorrent rhetoric. Chechnya’s case points out the significance of the structural situation in and out of the host state as well (Kaufman 1996). Putin’s decision to invade Chechnya had dual consequences: 2nd Chechen war upswung his popularity domestically and temporarily brought back the image of the powerful Russia outside (Baev 2004).

4. Concluding Remarks

The ethnically divided states in transition face the issue of secessionism. The situation is exacerbated by the autonomous institutions, political and economic, as they become a source of political instability and trigger separation movement.

The research identified three major factors - geographic location, historical memory (primordial marker) of co-development of the major ethnic groups in the autonomy which is used to build constructivist ascriptions (collective memory) and structural situation in and out of both, autonomy and the central state. The paper argued that the combination of them impacts the type of means and consequent ends of the political leadership decision-making process. Significance of the factor-triad defines the specific set of the tactics that makes up the distinct strategies leading either to peaceful negotiation, case of Tatarstan, or violent confrontation, case of Chechnya.

Comparison of the event progression in two autonomous republics of the RF, Tatarstan and Chechnya, gives ability to test the puzzle stating that the regional authority applies either primordial

ascriptions or constructionist attitudes to apply distinct strategy considering geographic location and domestic and external environment. In case if none is available, the elite constructs the distinct idea/sentiment, constructivist attitude, by using the existed primordial markers, especially historical memory, through media propaganda, education, etc. or introduces new myth/legend, primordial marker, to modify common historical memory.

In case of Tatarstan, the geographic location, a heartland of the host state and centuries-long nonviolent co-development of two major ethnic groups, Tatar and Russian, influenced Tatar political elite decision to launch moderate and peaceful negotiation with the central authority. During the tough bargaining the regional authority introduced an effective ethno-politics which meant strengthening the Tatar ethnic sentiments, though inclusivity for the multi-ethnic groups introduced by the local authority enabled it to initiate construction of civil nationalism, consolidating factor of Tatarstan. The Tatar leadership instrumentalised alternatively a primordialist marker, historic memory, and constructivist instruments - education, language, literature, etc., to obtain strong popular support. On top, the demands were pushed in the right moment: the central state had to deal with the armed Chechen confrontation – domestical challenge, and on the international level the Kremlin had to demonstrate democratic transformations.

The Chechen case also validates explored puzzle. However, the outcome of the struggle was totally opposite. Sharing border, oppressive historical memory made it impossible to overcome deeply rooted hatred. Nationalistic ethnic politics forcefully depriving the Russians from political and economic activities and animosity disseminated by mass media propaganda intensified abhorrence between Chechens and Russians. Frequent recalling of the negative past (primordial marker) and tagging hostile labels (constructivist approach) built resilient Chechen ethnic nationalism that alienated these two ethnic groups. The central state strategy, application of the violent campaigns, to subside Chechen resistance, also had pertaining consequences on the both levels: domestically, punishment of the disobedient autonomy ruled out the demonstration effect and successfully, though forcefully, solved internal conflict brought back Russia's image of Superpower for the short time of period.

Overall, the three-factor combination (geographic proximity, instrumentalization of primordial and constructivist attitudes, consideration of structural situation in and out) impacts the political elite of both, the autonomous unit and central state, decisions, while they select the action plan from the strategy repertoire. In process of efficient operationalization of the decided strategy the political leadership instrumentalizes three tactics: implication of the primordial sentiments, application of the constructivist attitudes, and construction of new primordial markers or formation of the novel constructivist features from primordial ascriptions. Consequently, the ultimate goal, upgrading

autonomous status or getting full independence, is reached through diverse strategies: peaceful negotiations or violent confrontations.

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APPENDIX

- [1] Interview with the lecturer (did not specify the field of research), (ethnic Tatar), Kazan university, 03.23. 2020
- [2] Interview with the Russian professor of political science, Moscow State University, 22.12.2021
- [3] Interview with the professor of political science, (ethnic Tatar), Kazan State University, 30.06.2020
- [4] Interview with the professor of history, (ethnic Tatar), Kazan State University, 24.04.2020
- [5] Interview with the member of Shaimiev administration (ethnic Tatar), 10.05.2020
- [6] Interview with Russian professor of political science, Saint Petersburg University, 28.01.2022
- [7] Interview with the former Member of Parliament (1) (ethnic Chechen), now lives in France, 06.02.2021
- [8] Interview with the Chechen journalist (1), retired, now lives in Belgium, 20.04.2021
- [9] Interview with the Russian professor of conflictology, the Rostov-na-Donu University, 23.05.2022
- [10] Interview with the former Member of Parliament (2), (ethnic Chechen), now lives in France, 04.06.2021
- [11] Interview with interview with the Chechen journalist (2), retired, now lives in Ireland, 12.03.2022
- [12] Interview with the professor of linguistics, Kazan State University (Ethnic Tatar), 13.05.2020
- [13] Interview with the former Member of Parliament (3), (ethnic Chechen), now lives in Georgia, 03.03.2021.
- [14] Interview with the former Member of Parliament (4), now lives in France, 16.07.2021
- [15] Interview with the Chechen former minister (I was asked not to mention the name of the ministry), lives in Belgium, 02.06.2021
- [16] Interview with the school teacher (ethnic Chechen), now lives in Netherlands, 15.01.2022

- [17] Interview with the head of one of the departments of militia, Grozny, now lives in France, 05.08.2021
- [18] Interview with the head of one of the departments of militia, Grozny suburb, now lives in Ireland, 15.04.2021
- [19] Interview with the member of Dudayev administration, now lives in Germany, 15.10.2021
- [20] Interview with the wife of the minister (disappeared while being in the office), now lives in Germany, 22.11.2021
- [21] Interview with the public servant (1) (ethnic Chechen), retired, now lives in Ireland, 24.01.2021
- [22] Interview with university lecturer (ethnic Chechen), retired, now lives in France, 28.08.2021
- [23] Interview with the music teacher (ethnic Chechen), retired, now lives in Belgium, 18.06.2021
- [24] Interview with the public servant (2), (ethnic Chechen), retired, now lives in Netherlands, 26.01.2022
- [25] Interview with the militiaman from Grozny, (ethnic Chechen), now lives in France, 14.09.2021