Resolving Identity-based Conflicts in the North Caucasus

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Abstract
The article reviews the present state of analysis of regional conflict resolution in foreign and Russian literature. The goal of the research is to analyze the constructive methods for resolving ethno-political conflicts in the North Caucasus. Identity-based conflicts as a type of ethno-political conflicts have become a considerable obstacle to the Post-Soviet modernization in the current decade. The interest in the concept of identity-based conflict has been increasing worldwide during the first decade of the 21st century. Competing identity became a prism for studying the problem of security in multi-ethnic communities. A rapid strengthening of hyper-ethnic identity of the citizens of Russia occurred in two post-Soviet decades. It was manifested in the demands of ethnocentrism, national-cultural autonomy, secession, as well as in the substantial growth of tension in ethnic relations, which resulted in protracted identity-based conflicts. Conflict resolution in the North Caucasus may be built on the principles of civic solidarity and socio-political integration but not on the assimilation policy and suppression of ethnicities.

Keywords
ethno-political conflicts, conflict resolution, identity-based conflicts, socio-political integration, ethnic mobilization, modernization, North Caucasus, post-Soviet Russia

1 Introduction
Threats and challenges to the macro-social integration of post-Soviet Russia and the risks of destabilization of political institutions are to a large extent linked to identity-based conflicts. Such conflicts are caused by the effects of globalization and regionalization of ethnic cultures, and eruption and transformation of state ideologies. Ambivalent processes of conflict and consolidation based on active changes of macro-social identities are typical for periods of structural transformations of modern societies. We are the witnesses of the emergence and decline of many civic and ethno-regional identities in the post-traditional world. Rapid changes in identities threaten the integrity of multi-ethnic states. Thus, the category of identity became an important point of socio-political integration and global security. “Despite the encroachment of some unfavorable trends such as class polarization and persistent local particularities of cultures, socio-economic and political globalization forces together increase exposure to values which approach universal adoption, such as respect and moderation. Because such universal values develop into a common medium as a basis for non-violent communication between nation-states, a common peaceful disposition is nurtured among national leaders who are then less likely to resort to arms in times of crisis” (Choi, 2010).

Identity-based conflicts are a notable phenomenon in the post-traditional world where rational and irrational features fancifully intertwine in politics, social structures, culture and everyday life of common people. Thus a complex interpretation of reality is produced, partly rational and adequate, partly mythologized. This interpretation transforms into political action. In this case, the socio-political integration is a normative element of perception of the national security. The reduction of the role of civic identification, the growth of ethno-religious radicalism, new realities in ethnic and political life, new global rivalries, unstable processes of modernization in Russian society were significant factors of the emergence of a large number of identity-based conflicts and social instability.

The problem of socio-political integration of regional communities is one of the relevant in theoretical, methodological and practical aspects. This is due to the fundamental status of

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the integration problems in the political and social sciences as well as to the search for new integration resources and mecha-
nisms for resolving cultural conflicts. Post-Soviet transforma-
tions conditioned the crisis of values and institutions of social
consolidation. The relevance of studying the anti-conflict
potential of social integration in the North Caucasus is caused
by the necessity to elaborate the new metaethnic models of
consolidation forming the civic identity and supporting the
cross-cultural dialogue and ethnic cooperation. Sociopolitical
integration as a process of supporting and promoting the civic
values, identities, institutions and enabling all social subjects
to participate in political life on the basis of principles of jus-
tice and equal rights becomes the major method of resolving
identity-based conflicts. Integration eliminates the process of
mechanic consolidation based on the force of assimila-
tory compulsion and suppression of cultural distinctions in a
repressive attempt to impose a unified identity.

2 Methodology, Methods and Stages of the Research

The term “identity-based conflicts” appeared in the
works of J. Burton and J. Rothman in 1990s (Burton, 1990;
Rothman, 1997). In J. Burton’s works, identity is regarded
as one of the basic human needs, and the perceived threat to
cultural identity of a group is regarded by group members as
a major threat to their security. In this aspect, J. Burton out-
lined two fundamental needs - the need for identity and the
need for security. According to J. Burton, existing tensions
might potentially evolve into deep-rooted conflicts that rest
on underlying needs that cannot be compromised, and where
interests and positions are deemed non-negotiable.

In J. Rothman’s studies, the essential element of conflicts of
tunities is human subjectivity. According to J. Rothman, in
identity-based conflicts, where the main issues are often threat-
ened or frustrated needs and values, deep internal consensus
may be forged around such needs and values.

The conflict resolution theory focuses its attention on the
capacity of socio-political integration to transform the destruc-
tive identity-based conflicts into constructive conflicts of inter-
ests. Civic integration becomes the main method of constructive
conflict resolution on the basis of meta-ethnic identification.

3 Results and Discussion

Identity-based conflicts reflect acute controversies in collec-
tive values shared by the parties involved into conflicts. Such
conflicts in the post-traditional world are mainly related to the
resistance to integration of developing countries into the global
system of transnational communication. Identity-based conflicts
are nowadays one of central ideas of the theory of conflict trans-
formation and conflict resolution. Social and cultural identities
— religious, ethnic, racial, cultural — are the ground for groups
of people to come into conflict. Unlike conflicts of interests,
identity-based conflicts are hardly soluble. Another problem
is participation of mediators, facilitators and other third-party
actors. Their intervening into such conflicts is in most cases
regarded by the parties involved in conflict as abetting.

The participants of identity-based conflicts cannot rational-
ize the situation and often experience difficulty in explaining
the reasons of their personal actions. Motives for participa-
tion of individuals and groups in identity-based conflicts are
very important for the assessment of the perspectives of con-
lict resolution; in order to satisfy their material interests peo-
ple are unlikely to risk their lives. But there are many cases
where participation in a conflict is more or less pronounced as
a sacrifice but not an imminent risk; sometimes willingness to
make sacrifices for the sake of any lofty ideals is clearly rec-
ognized or verbalized by the parties of identity-based conflicts.
The growth of ethnic conflicts in Russia occurs when ethnic
groups tend to perceive themselves as victims of value claims
of other ethno-religious and ethno-political groups, i.e. in the
situation of awareness of a threat to group security. In this
aspect, an adequate identification of mechanisms of identity-
based conflict initiation and the involvement of new members
are the path for forecasting and early warning of conflicts.
Identity-based conflicts do not always fit into the simple cogni-
tive schemes. According to Rothman, one of the attributes of
the identity-based conflict is its “elusiveness”. In other words,
such a conflict is deeply subjective; rivals found in an identity-
based conflict sometimes can hardly explain the nature of their
rivalry. When the conflicting parties describe their controver-
sial issues in terms of history, of events or significance, an out-
side observer may hear very different stories. The fact that one
side presents as a struggle for freedom, the other presents as a
terrorism (Rothman, 1997).

“Group identity relates to a more primordial or pre-modern
idea of community and harkens back to closed collective societ-
ies, in which individualism plays no ideological role. Today
these societies must function within the modern, globalized
world, preserving their subculture by holding on to more col-
lective values; within these communities, expressions of iden-
tity may refer to authentic values of the community, tradition or
religious scripts. When mediation is used within the framework
of collective identity, a natural clash may ensue between the
different groups to which the parties belong, and no treatment
of individual-level interests will help to repair the rift that a
clash like this causes. In fact, attempts to reduce these differ-
ences to interests that may be coordinated or worse, construc-
tively manipulated, can actually lead to intensifications of iden-
tity-based conflicts” (Rothman and Alberstein, 2013).

One of the regions of Russian Federation where identity-
based conflicts are wide spread is the North Caucasus. It is the
region where different civilizations meet, synchronically and
diachronically. Traditional socio-cultural communities that
define the social landscape of the North Caucasus cannot come
to a compromise about their identities and group values. The

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way to alter this situation is the construction and maintenance
Russian civic identity based on non-ethnic affiliations thus
eliminating or substantially reducing intolerance as negative
stereotyped images of “others” and the rejection of otherness.

The most appropriate way of conflict management in the
situation of identity-based conflicts is socio-political integra
tion on the basis of democratic institutions and civic identity,
the mutual recognition of the importance of equality of basic
needs and fundamental values of each of the parties and joint
solution of common problems. The social and political security
of Western countries is based on a certain socio-cultural basis
that is the stable identification with the Western world, with
Western civilization. Such identity can be shattered only in a
case of dramatic changes in the Western world, the changes that
are most unlikely at present time. The emerging supranational
and supra-ethnic identities only consolidate the Western iden
tity. Situation is different in post-Soviet Russia.

Russia is a typical country where identity-based con
licts play a great role in political and social life. This can be
explained by two main reasons. Firstly, it is the legacy of the
break-up of the Soviet Union that resulted in the decline of the
soviet identity. Secondly, it is the priority of the develop-
ment of present-day Russia. Such priority is modernization that
includes not only economic modernization, but political and
cultural modernization as well. Political and cultural moderni-
ization is connected with the success in reaching three goals:
socio-political integration, de-traditionalization of post-Soviet
Russia and de-escalation of identity-based conflicts.

The theoretical tradition of studying the socio-political inte-
gration is associated with the conceptual confrontation of the
theories of conflict, multiculturalism, liberal and egalitarian
methodology. The controversy consists in treating the essence of
an ethnic conflict and reasonability of rights for ethnic minorities
in pluralist societies. With regard to this, the conflictologists rely
on analyzing the conflictogenic nature of ethnicity. The multi-
culturalists proceed from the normalization of ascriptive status
of identification with ethnic and religious traditions. Meanwhile,
the representatives of egalitarian and neofunctionalist paradigm
interpret the rights of minorities from the standpoint of equal
opportunities and the structural principle of civic integration.

The necessity of promoting the socio-political integration in
post-Soviet Russia is due to instrumental causes: from the ethic
viewpoint, the creation of an integrated “society for everyone”
is self-evident societal goal; the structural causes of supporting
the integration are associated with economic, social, ethnic dis-
tinctions that reduce mobility, which in its turn leads to social
fragmentation and produces a negative effect on the moderni-
zation process and prevention of ethnic conflicts in their most
destructive form – the conflicts of identities. Social integration
as a social construct depends on three different yet interrelated
process, which form the integration civic identity in the sys-
temic unity, in particular:

1. Acknowledgement of ethnic pluralism for promoting the
macro-social solidarity within the legal space.
2. Political representation of ethnic communities for grant-
ing a guarantee of the interests, identities and values of
various groups being taken into account when state deci-
sions are made and resources are allocated.
3. Redistribution of economic and political resources be-
tween various social subjects for preventing the inequalities,
disproportions and fragmentation on the basis of
economic status, ethnic and religious identity.

These principles of socio-political integration in the process
of resolving the identities conflicts in the North Caucasus are
based on the conceptual models of cultural pluralism, justice,
human rights, social inclusion, equal opportunities, and soli-
darity. The combination of concepts of individual freedom and
group loyalty as counter-narratives to forced assimilation can
be viewed as movement toward pluralism and respect for cul-
tural distinctions at both individual and collective levels. When
analyzing the status of identities in the dynamics of conflicts,
the authors point at the association of group identities with the
primordial and pre-modern idea of society, which brings us
back to studying the closed groups where individualism plays
no noticeable ideological role. Today such societies can func-
tion in the globalized world by means of keeping their own
culture on the basis of collective values; within the groups, the
group identification can be correlated to their genuine values,
traditions or religious texts. When we are dealing with a group
clash during mediation, turning to individual interests cannot
smooth out the gap emerging due to the conflict. Any attempts
to manipulate the groups can bring about the intensification of
ethno-political conflicts.

Social justice, creation of the society for everyone is an
overarching goal and a crucial structural element of social inte-
gration. Social justice belongs to societal principles, values and
institutions, which enable each person to obtain a fair share of
benefit for a fair share of responsibility within the joint living
in the society. The social justice concepts determine the civic
society as the most desirable and attainable on condition that
the rights and responsibilities are distributed in line with the
agreed equality principles; this is a society where all people can
take part in social, economic and political life on the basis of
equal rights and opportunities, justice and merit.

Socio-political integration reduces the ethnic tension, which
is associated with a high level of solidarity and security, reduc-
tion of social problems interpreting by means of creating nega-
tive ethnic stereotypes of “others” as “cultural enemies". The
main objective of integration is to rationalize the controversies
in the process of transformation of conflictogenic hierarchical
system of ethnic relationships. Each ethnic conflict has its own
unique characteristics and some of these elements will be more
noticeable than the others in various contexts. However, they
are all common denominators of the ethnic conflict genesis. The primordialist approach helps explain the role of conflict potential of an ethnic identity. The concepts of political entrepreneurs and resource competition approaches explain how the institutional and political factors interact with ethnic emotions. The diverse ethnic communities have various extents of the conflict potential. The ethnic emotions rooted in memories of historical offences underlie the potential conflicts.

The ethnicity embodies in itself an element of a powerful emotional tension, which can be reactivated if the groups realize a threat to their own interests. This results in ethnification, ethnic intolerance, competition and ultimately – in a violent ethnic conflict. At the macro-social level, the social and cultural integration forms the rational and communicative mechanisms consolidating the civic society on the basis of tolerance and metaethnic solidarity. Politicization of ethnicity as a factor of ethno-social tension directly depends on the acuteness of feeling the threats to group security. The conflicts of identities are dangerous because in their genesis and dynamics the ethnic stereotypes and social dissatisfaction are highly likely to be politicized. The effect of attitudes to violence consists in focusing the socially aggressive potential in the point of ethnic irreconcilability. The extent of violence in identities conflicts is determined by the acuteness of perceiving the threats to group security, the intensity of social dissatisfaction, and the scale of institutional support, which jointly are the conditions of open confrontation. In the North Caucasus, the negative ethnic stereotypes in interpreting the threats to group security and generated by value and structural controversies act as a source of deep ethno-political conflicts.

The disappearance of soviet identity was a real cultural catastrophe of the 1990-es. Ordinary people could not understand who they were and where was their place in the world. Russian civic identity was practically non-existent at that time. This was a serious threat to social security underestimated by the then authorities. Russia’s political space remained highly conflict-generating for at least for a decade mainly due to the incompleteness of the supra-ethnic Russian civil identity. It remains unstable up to now, though certain progress is obvious. Overcoming the post-Soviet identity crisis was not included into the priorities of the first generation of post-Soviet reformers of the early Romantic period of Russian transition: it was considered sufficient to destroy the Soviet identity. It should be noted that the Russian identity remains largely post-soviet, i.e. transitional identity. The post-soviet identity that was formed in the first half of the 1990s was and could be only a conflict identity.

There are other vectors of the construction of socio-political identities: European identity, regional identity (the orientation on new regional centers of stable growth) and ethno-national (ethno-political) identity. Such abundance in options of identification resulted in the absence of stable identities by the end of 1990-s and serious social and political instability in the country. All those types of identities are highly competitive, and if the ethno-religious identities in modern Russia are a fait accompli, European and regional identities are not formed yet. Thus several identification projects exist in Russia not only diachronically (the above-mentioned three stages of Russia’s identity policy), but synchronically as well. Such situation only hinders the formation of modern Russian civil identity. It is important to underline, that the political elite of Russia has surely made its choice: it is Western and European identity.

Post-Soviet Russia’s society has gone through several stages of transformation of the policy of identity since 1991. The first was the mentioned above ‘romantic period’ of Russia’s reforms, the stage of orientation to Western values and social institutions and the denial of all Soviet. That period was characterized by the belief that Russia would be integrated into the Western world as an equal partner quite soon, would build a society of the Western type and join the political structures of Western civilization within a short historical period. It should be noted that this strategy still has many adherents among Russia’s political and intellectual elite despite its obvious failure. The second stage was characterized by distancing of a significant part of intellectual elite from the Eurocentric scheme, the growing popularity of neo-eurasianism, the emergence of ideas of ethnic nationalism, isolationism and “reasonable self-sufficiency” as a defensive reaction to the changing situation in the world in the second part of the 1990s. This period can be described as a crisis of the Western vector of Russian identity. The first decade of the 21st century was characterized by a new search of an integral Russian identity, which should be based on its own foundation and at the same time reflect the realities of the 21st century. This was the third stage of the formation of a new Russian identity.

The religious renaissance of the 1990-s produced a number of negative phenomena in post-Soviet Russia: the emergence of ethno-religious fundamentalism and extremism, the participation of religious leaders in political and electoral processes, the use of Islamic rhetoric by ethnic separatists that led to the perception of ethnic crisis in public opinion in the terms of a religious conflict. A major problem for the stability of North Caucasus’ society up to now are not so much contradictions between confessional groups as contradiction within confessional groups (for instance, between ‘traditional’ Islam and the Wahhabis).

The religious factor of traditionalist renaissance in Russia became one of the most important instruments of ethnic mobilization. Constant appeals of politicians, public and social figures to religion resulted in more tangible forms of cultural differences, and the act of religious identification quite often is not the result of spiritual search, but is an act of socio-cultural identification. In this case, the religious factor, not being a potential source of identity-based conflicts by itself, may play an important role in forming the grounds for identity-based conflicts.
The interest of Russian citizens in religion is due to two major trends: 1) the increasing importance of religious identities on the background of a relative reduction of the role of ethnic identity in the first decade of the 21st century; 2) the wide spread of the anomalies of socio-cultural subjectivity. In the context of a protracted identity crisis of Russian society there is a need for real or symbolic compensation for the loss of stable identities of the past. Sometimes, especially on a personal level, religious renaissance results in the extreme forms of religious fanaticism, intolerance and aggression against the atheists and people of other faiths (‘infidels’). Moreover, while the probability of conflicts that can be correctly identified as religious (secular) is small, the escalation of tensions in the poly-confessional Russia’s regions is quite possible in different directions: either inside one religion among its denominations and groups or between different religions or between religious and secular world. Fundamentalism seeks to establish and maintain the basic non-negotiable criteria for “true” ethno-religious identity.

Identity-based conflicts are determined by the general crisis of integration strategy. But the specific feature of such conflicts in that region is that they reflect the controversy between traditionalism and modernity. Traditionalism became a serious obstacle to economic and social development and a source of many tensions and conflicts. The process of revivalism of radical ethnicity of the 1990-s in the North Caucasus is still acting as a conflict producing factor. Collective rights for a traditional way of life are supported by public opinion and intellectuals. In the North Caucasus the radical ethno-nationalism that initiates identity-based conflicts, reveals the institutional degradation of civil culture and destabilization of regional democratic process. Civil affiliations and responsibility are replaced by mobilization of reactive traditionalism; the religious fundamentalism becomes the most important tool of the disputed activity. Remaining unresolved, regional ethno-political conflicts that have begun as the conflicts of interests, turn into conflicts of identities thus generating and perpetuating violence. The probability of their solution in future decreases substantially and such conflicts very often transform into protracted conflicts. The escalation of identity-based conflicts and their transformation into armed clashes is a serious threat to stability not only in the Caucasian region, but in Russia as a whole.

The North Caucasian region is characterized both by realistic conflicts and non-realistic conflicts that is the conflicts of identities. The latter tend to transform into forced conflicts-clashes. Besides, identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus are characterized by traditional and affective type of social interactions, and also by absence of “real objectiveness” that transform those conflicts into emotionally loaded and resistant to management. Such conflicts become a value and a means at the same time. Thus, negative cultural stereotypes are a serious obstacle to an open dialogue, despite multiple initiatives and declared intentions.

Traditional identity is expressed in a high-level symmetry between objective and subjective realities. As a result we can see ‘strong’ identities in traditional societies, based on tribal, clan or ethnic (primordial) identities or more complex but still very prescriptive religious identity. Ethnoreligious identities in traditional societies become “socially predefined”, totalitarian in their content. Communal person within ethno-clan is the subject of total control of his social and political behavior. The process of personal identification is replaced by socially significant positions of “a man with genuine religious or ethnic identity” and unified social roles. Any threat to such identities can bring to a conflict.

The systemic crisis caused by protracted identity-based conflicts at regional level can be overcome by deliberate designing of integrative civic identity, cultivation of such major elements of global culture, as democratization, transparency, rationalization. The formation of integrative civic identity can help to create stable relations between ethno-cultural groups in multiethnic Russian regions. Social integration creates conditions for reduction of the uncontrolled, ‘nonrealistic’ conflicts of identities and their transformation into soluble “realistic” conflicts of interests. Overcoming identity-based conflicts in Southern Russia depends on an active civic stand, and on not only legal status of a person, but also on his/her ability to sociocultural integration on the basis of civil cooperation and cultural dialogue. Russia is in a sharp need of a new model of sociopolitical integration.

Integration implies equitable social relationships, civic solidarity, and moral community, based on tolerance, tactfulness, trust and security. The systemic crisis caused by identity-based conflicts at the regional level can be overcome by purposefully constructing the integration civic identity, by cultivating such paramount elements of civic culture as democratization, pluralism, rationalized perception of “other” cultural identities.

In the North Caucasian society, the strategy of conflict resolution has to be built on the principles of civic solidarity and cooperation but not on assimilation policy or suppression of ethnic distinctions.

Socio-political integration can become the foundation of “prevention” of identity-based conflicts (in the concept of J. Burton), which means that an adequate explanation of the phenomenon of conflict should include human factors and not only the conditions that are in charge of a conflict, as well as structural changes necessary to resolve the conflict, thus changing the cultural environment from confrontation to cooperation. Burton meant primarily “horizontal” relationships, i.e. dialogue and cooperation of actors or conflict parties; thus, according to J. Burton, a detailed analysis of conflict and expansion of strategies requires the involvement of new actors. They can be civil society organizations, educational, scientific institutions, diverse groups of “civil mediation” and “civic diplomacy”.

Specific features of identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus are determined by acute contradiction between two
models of development: the static model, based on ethno-religious traditionalism and dynamic model, based on the idea of secular modernization. These conflicts are connected with political mobilization of ethnic and religious identities. The ethno-religious hierarchy as a factor of identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus becomes a source of creation of new traditionalist projects of fundamentalism. The processes of modernization in the region develop asymmetrically, and this strengthens identity-based tensions and conflicts. One of the factors, that make those conflicts more acute in the North Caucasus, is social and ethno-social exclusion. Other factors are economic fragmentation ("shadow" economy and ethnic division of labor, high level of corruption), the disintegration of social space of the region act. During the last 15 years traditionalism and regionalization in the North Caucasus acquired the more and more conflict producing character, thus threatening the system of social and political security in the region.

The analysis of relation between the ethnic tension and identity at the regional level leads us to the idea of destructive effect of system controversies conditioned by social fragmentation and disintegration, dissatisfaction in the basic needs of equality, justice, and security. In the empirical study of the ethno-confessional relationships development prospects in the North Caucasus, it is pointed out that interethnic relationships in the region can be characterized as stably tense ones. Alongside with that, neither the former nor the latter are viewed as the acutest problems and rank 11 and 15, respectively, out of 16 suggested in the social problems topicality rating. This result proved to be slightly unexpected, given the character of the place occupied by the ethnonational problems range in the social and political discourse in the region. According to the respondents, the problems which are common for the entire country are the most relevant: corruption and bribery (48.5%), prices and taxes growth and inflation (46.5%), unemployment (38.6%), the rise in crime (34.9%); housing problem and the communal service problems (32.8%). Although the respondents have estimated the probability of interethnic conflicts as average, in conditions of a stable tension any conflict regardless of its true causes can quickly turn into an interethnic one. For such circumstances, perceiving the actions of people of other nationalities as a potential threat to one’s own nationality security is characteristic. The situation that has formed creates favorable conditions for ethno-conflict mobilization – quick uniting of people according to their national sign for participating in the conflict actions. The high tension in interethnic relationships is the main reason why local conflicts having an interethnic component keep to break out within the North Caucasus (Avksentiev and Shul’ga, 2013).

Ethno-political processes in the North Caucasus in the first decade of the 21st century changed the nature of threats to regional, national and social security of Russia in comparison with the early and mid-1990s. At the beginning of the 21st century there was a de-escalation of armed ethnic conflicts but radical ethnic nationalism that produces terrorism and regional conflicts is still very active. Extremism and terrorism led to institutional degradation and destabilization of modest sprouts of civic culture and democratic processes in the region. The North Caucasus is an important and integral part of Russia, one of its “cornerstones”; the problems of the region will affect the fate of the entire country. In addition, attention should be paid to the local hotbeds of ethnopolitical and ethno-social tensions, the correct identification of existing tensions and proactive elimination of the causes. The emergence and escalation of a definite conflict is based on a certain basis of the conflict, which includes a number of objective and subjective factors, in particular, a problem that gave a rise to social tensions, carriers of the problem who gradually transform into conflict participants, the various players looking to get their benefits from participation in the conflict.

The technologies of conflict settlement, which recommend isolating the identity from the concealed controversy and the conflict situation, are an example of conflictological management capable of aggravating but not resolving the ethnic controversy. When a realistic conflict touches on resources or conscious clearly defined goals, the traditional technologies can be a useful reference point in the conflict resolution process. However, as the in-depth subjective and emotional problems get involved into the conflicts, such as maintaining the group solidarity and security, it seems impossible to separate the identity from the conflict problem because collective identities of the conflict participants are under threat; at least, this is how the identity conflict parties interpret their genesis. When resolving ethno-political conflicts, it makes no sense to apply the control methods using the structural separation of various conflict components: an attempt to separate emotions, values, identities from the essence of controversy can only aggravate the ethnic conflict and to give a destructive character to the forms of manifestation thereof. J. Burton’s conflicts resolution theory suggests taking into account the basic human needs that differ from the interests and include the necessity of group security and acknowledgement of the unique identity and using them in conflict management during the conflict resolution. The main goal for the conflict resolution has to be elimination of moral and psychological threats, tension and disappointments in basic needs and not only satisfaction of the material interests. J. Rothman considers the collective identities as self-perceptions filled with a “cultural formula”. The cultural formula is based on the inner needs and preferences, group characteristics and collective values. In identities conflicts, it can be personal, group or intergroup one yet the identity is always the source of controversy and conflict catalyst. The parties can perceive themselves as personal maximizers while protecting the individualistic values; they can be groups and feel as a part of a collective unity; they can feel as carriers of multiple cultural identities and enter the conflicts at the intergroup level. All these...
perceptions are generated by the cultural formula – identity. The identity becomes an ideological basis of the conflict participants which is filled with personal, group and intergroup emotions, values and meanings (Rothman and Alberstein, 2013).

The following factors make a conflict situation acute and intractable: 1) identity-based conflicts touch on existentially important values; 2) the participants are involved into conflicts emotionally; 3) identity-based conflicts cease to be a means of overcoming the frustration but become a goal in itself. The irrational stereotypes in perception of “other” cultures (the negative interpretations of cultural distinctions) play the key part in initiating the conflicts of identities. The specific character of identity-based conflicts is due to acute controversy between the static (traditionalization) and dynamic (modernization) social systems and it consists in the political mobilization of ethnicity. The ethnic stereotypes as a factor of these conflicts become the source of intolerance and ethno-nationalism formation.

Moreover, social inequalities and economic polarizations as the structural factors determine the poignancy of ethnic tension and, consequently, the escalation of ethno-political conflicts in the North Caucasus. The conflict source in the region is the controversy between the systemic modernization and social disintegration. Cultural isolationism and political regionalization in the North Caucasus are acquiring a pronounced conflictogenic character. The social and cultural factors of escalation of regional conflicts are the growth of unemployment, low life level, low education level, poor tolerance, adherence to ethnic clan system, and religious fundamentalism.

The specific character of identity-based conflicts is due to a clash between the static (traditionalization) and dynamic (modernization) types of social reproduction and it consists in ethno-political mobilization. The systemic determinants of these conflicts are politicization of ethnicity, social inequalities, and polarization. In these conditions, modernization progresses in an asynchronous manner, which aggravates the regional isolationism and forms new conflict identities. The potential of the ethnic integration consists in making the socio-political status of co-citizenship relevant and in ensuring a fair access to the economic sphere. In this case, the civic integration is perceived by an ethnic community as a safe resource and not as obstacles of which they have to get rid of.

There are following aspects we have to be borne in mind when discussing the sociopolitical integration in Southern Russia and North Caucasus. First, integration is a macro-political project the content of which is largely determined by the problems of ensuring the social security and by the polyethnic configuration of the Russian society. Second, the development of post-Soviet Russia after armed ethnic conflicts termination demonstrates that it is inadmissible and impossible to orient to political isolationism and cultural exceptionality of ethnic communities.

4 Conclusion

In the post-Soviet decades, traditionalization of ethnic communities as a reaction to the crisis of civic society is the main conflict factor. The changing Russian regions continue to search for ways of resolving conflicts caused by ethnic identity. In the North Caucasus, ethno-nationalism indicates the institutional degradation of civic identity and the destabilization of regional democratic processes. Socio-political integration is replaced by ethnic mobilization and radical neo-traditionalism; religious fundamentalism becomes an essential tool for identity-based conflicts. Such conflicts are characterized by destructive power, it is difficult to manage, resolve and settle them.

Socio-economic polarization generates apathy and passivity of the population while pushing the carriers of radical ideologies toward illegitimate forms of protest and political extremism. In this case, systemic stability and integrity of polyethnic democracies can be built on the basis of civic solidarity and socio-political integration. Traditionalization and regionalization in post-Soviet Russia does not allow for the formation of civic identity. Remaining unresolved, ethno-social tension becomes the identity-based conflicts, annihilating human morality and generate violence. The escalation of these conflicts and their transformation into an armed struggle in Southern Russia led to self-destruction not only of the region but also the Russian state as a whole.

Identity-based interaction implies ambiguous, contradictory and diametrically opposite effects on the same political, cultural and historical contexts. On the one hand, the identity-based interactions contribute to the development of civic consciousness, increasing the social importance of an individual and the level of political rights and freedoms. On the other hand, when such interactions transform into identity-based conflicts they threaten the security of civil societies. Conflict-generating character of group identities in Russia should be considered in the context of forming a new national security system as an integral part of the global security. Despite the fact that attempts to build a new collective identity did not bring to a sufficient result, the main positive result of the post-communist reform is the realizing of the fact, that civic identities are critically important for the creation of a modern system of socio-political integration. Construction of civic identity that meets the challenges of social security in a rapidly changing world is one of the key tasks of post-Soviet Russia’s society on the path to integration, democratization and modernization.

The necessity of promoting the socio-political integration in Southern Russia and North Caucasus is due to instrumental causes: from the ethnic viewpoint, the creation of an integrated “society for everyone” is self-evident societal goal; the structural causes of supporting the integration are associated with economic, social, ethnic distinctions that reduce mobility, which in its turn leads to social fragmentation and produces a
negative effect on the modernization process and prevention of ethnic conflicts in their most destructive form of identity-based conflicts. The socio-political integration objectives of ensuring the national security and resolving the ethnic tensions in their most destructive form, identity-based conflicts, have a systemic character. In post-Soviet Russia, socio-political integration becomes a prevention method as a way of conflict resolution – proactive effect on the conflict environment by means of structural changes and rationalization of ethnic tensions.

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