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**POLITICAL CRISIS IN RUSSIA:  
THE REGIONAL DIMENSION**

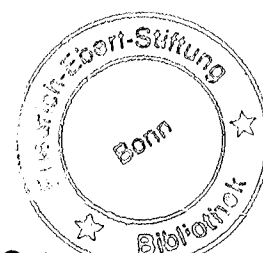
Bonn, im Dezember 1993

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Studie Nr. 58 der Abteilung **Außenpolitikforschung** im Forschungsinstitut der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Godesberger Allee 149, 53175 Bonn.

ISSN: 0938-9571

ISBN: 3-86077-112-4



**C 94 - 00045**

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## 1. Introduction: The Place of the Geographical Factor in Russia's Realities

In the events of fall 1993, Russian President Yeltsin apparently defeated his most important opponents in the Russian parliament. Analyzing Russia's political crisis, many in the West concentrated on the struggle between the President and those anti-reformist groups consolidated around Vice-President A. Rutskoi and Speaker of the Parliament R. Khasbulatov. Consequently, another aspect was often overlooked: the regional dimension of the crises. Today, using the adjective "regional" almost automatically attracts public attention - be it in a statesman's speech or a newspaper article. Although the landmarks of regionalization in Russia have long been visible to everyone, they have always taken the country by surprise since they represent an unusual aspect of Russia's political culture.

Prominent Russian philosophers repeatedly stressed that the "geographical factor" is one of the basics (and at the same time peculiarities) of Russia's identity. In the words of the philosopher P. Chaadaev, "this is one factor that has strongly dominated our history, that has concentrated the philosophy of this history, that appears in all the epochs of our social life and determines their nature, that is a significant element of our political grandeur and at the same time a real reason for our mental weakness."<sup>1</sup>

The peculiarity of Russia's national self-awareness has always included the phenomenon of a "moving border", a border that is not strictly drawn on the territory. Primarily it probably referred to the times of the Tatar-Mongolian yoke. Absolute hostility to this power could have led to the formation of a relatively medium-sized, Europe-oriented state. The Russians have chosen another direction - to incorporate this opposing power. Thus, the external contradiction has become an internal one. Later, with continued Russian expansion to the East, the phenomenon of a "moving border" grew even stronger.

The incorporation of external contradictions potentially leads to internal instability. This is why the inability of the Soviet leadership to realize the possible consequences of the tremendous

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1 P. Chaadaev, Apologetics of a Madman, Moscow, 1989, p. 148.

scale of the country and its multinational character looks paradoxical.

Taking possession of giant spaces was accompanied by a massive centralization of the country. Russia's unique centralized system was built on the disproportionate weakness of local communities and local authorities. Nowadays Moscow (and to a lesser extent Saint Petersburg) "absorbs" most of the intellectual, cultural and spiritual potential of the country. However, from the moment Russia acquired an independent statehood, the process of decentralization began actively to develop. Currently, Russia is perceived by the international community as the "country of countries" - as a unique community of diverse social and economic structures and cultural landscapes. For the West, the "opening" of Russia was like discovering a new world.

Although the perception of it in the West has changed, Russia remains essentially alien. It still "attracts Europeans with its mystery, but repels with its barbarity."<sup>2</sup> According to many European political researchers, Russia represents another civilization and a political culture fundamentally different from the West.<sup>3</sup> Recently, regionalization in Russia has attracted the attention of researchers in Europe, particularly in Germany.<sup>4</sup> However, European knowledge of regional developments in Russia remains limited. The same could be said for Russian knowledge about Europe.

For decades, in Western Europe the processes and phenomena of regional developments and the problems of federalism have been at the focus of scientific research and political debates. For Russia, they are still more or less "terra incognita".

In this paper I will examine the development of the political relations between Russia's Center and the regions from 1990 to the present. Although these relations were in part overshadowed by the

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<sup>2</sup> N. Berdyaev, Destination of Russia, Moscow, 1918, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, G. Schopflin, N. Wood (eds.), In Search of Central Europe, Cambridge, Oxford, 1989. The main idea of the book is to demonstrate the differences and contradictions between Europe and Russia and to stress the impossibility of their rapprochement.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, S. De Spiegeleire, "Raspad: The Further Disintegration of the Russian Federation and its Policy Implications for the West," Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Ebenhausen, February 1993.

struggle between President Yeltsin and the parliament, these two layers of Russia's political life were also strongly interrelated.

However, I will concentrate on the Center-region relationship. This follows from the basic assumption that Russia can only develop into a robust democracy if it manages to build a genuine federation which solves the main conflicts between Center and periphery. In my analysis I will also put forward some proposals of how to reach this end.

## 2. National Territorial Division of the Russian Federation

Understanding the territorial organization of Russia is the first step toward realizing its current regional problems. Without adopting the principle which forms the basis of Russia's territorial organization, all fluctuations in regional development in Russia will not seem grounded and explicable to the reader.

Currently, the Russian Federation consists of 87 regions, not counting two cities of federal competence. But the inner federalization continues, so probably this number is not the final one.<sup>5</sup> Basically, one can divide the regions into three different types according to the rights that they enjoyed under the old constitution.

A. *Autonomous republics* enjoyed the most far-reaching rights. They had been formed by certain titular nations and formally had the right to secede from the Russian Federation and establish their own sovereign statehood.

B. *Territorial Units* (kray, oblast) represent purely territorial, geographical regions without any national characteristics. They are populated mostly by Russians and their borders are rather arbitrary.

C. *Autonomous Regions* (autonomous oblast, autonomous okrug) are not only a part of the Federation; they also form parts of the administrative units and therefore must answer to regional as well

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<sup>5</sup> The mass media constantly use the number 88, which can be explained by an ignorance of geography. It is not clear how the number 88 came into use, but in Russia now there are 21 republics, 49 oblast, 6 kray, 10 autonomous okrug and 1 autonomous oblast, which gives a total of 87.

as federal authorities. Most of these regions form the periphery of Russia, i.e. the North and South-East of its Asiatic part. They are sparsely populated by Russians and numerous aboriginal nationalities, which are so scanty that they cannot claim to form their own elements of statehood. These regions enjoy the fewest rights.

It is clear that the principle of Russia's territorial division is two-fold: the national and the purely territorial. This dualism forms the very framework of Russia's organization.

### 3. The Beginning: The Federation Treaty and the Related Debate

Russia was established as a federation in 1918. The first documents which established its federal structure were the "Declaration of the People's Rights" and the "Declaration of the Rights of the Working People". The latter was incorporated into the constitution of the RSFSR, adopted on 10 July 1918. Chapter 1, item 2 of the constitution said: "The Soviet Russian Republic is established on the basis of a free union of the free nations as a *federation of Soviet national republics.*" In this wording the national emphasis is clear. Administrative units are not mentioned as subjects of the Federation. However, this was not important before Russia acquired its independence in 1991.

The former Russia (RSFSR) was federative only in theory. In reality it was a dependent part of a unitarian state, i.e. the Soviet Union. Russia's pseudo-federal structure has been revealed only in the past few years.

In 1990-91, the democratic forces in Russia declared the supremacy of republican over union legislation and recognized the sovereign rights of the autonomous republics. The consequences were far-reaching. First the collapse of the Soviet Union, then the accelerating disintegration of Russia itself.

As the legal successor of the USSR and the RSFSR, the Russian Federation should have either retained the documents of 1918 or publicly declined them. However, this choice has been avoided. In the "Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Russian Federation", adopted 12 June 1990, which marked a turning-point in

Russia's history, nothing is said about the federative structure of the country.

In Russia therefore a so-called "parade of sovereignties" began. The regions began their transformation into more or less independent subjects of the Federation. A month after Russia, in July 1990, North Ossetia adopted a Declaration of Sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> Then the process of gaining sovereignty became an avalanche. During this time (1990-1992), the main participants of the process were national formations, i.e. autonomous republics and regions (Khakassia, Komi, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Udmurtia, Yakutia-Sakha, Adygeya, Buryatia, Karelia, etc.).

It is obvious, however, that there is a tremendous gap between the declaration of sovereignty and its practical realization. In 1991-92, most Russian experts thought that the declarations of sovereignty appeared significant only at first glance. Upon closer inspection they would reveal themselves to be no more than phantoms of a sovereignty which could hardly be realized.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent developments, however, showed this argument to be false. It was an understandable mistake, because at first the only republic which consistently and systematically realized its sovereignty was Tatarstan.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of 1991, as a reaction to the "sovereignization" in the autonomous formations, several oblast and kray Soviets (Irkutsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, etc.) adopted a declaration of their status as "independent, enjoying equal rights as subjects of the Federation." No direct reaction from the Supreme Soviet followed. But regional sovereignization continued to develop - primarily in the "rich" regions of Siberia and the Far East. Their key demands were: regional legislative regulation of property terms and the formation of budgets from within.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> North Ossetia was also the first region which unilaterally raised its status to that of a Union Republic within the Russian Federation.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, "Russian Regions in the Period of Crises and Reform," Political Monitoring of Russia, American Bureau on Human Rights, Moscow, N3, 1992, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> More detailed information about the position of Tatarstan and Chechnya - see footnote 11.

<sup>9</sup> In the European part of Russia one notices an interesting but natural phenomenon. "Rich" agricultural or industrial regions (Lipetzk, Belgorod oblast, Krasnodar, Stavropol kray) showed much more independence than the "poor" regions more strictly

One must admit that the position of the federal authorities played an active role in reinforcing the trend of disintegration. The Center<sup>10</sup> passively gave up its positions under pressure from regional elites. In fact, it proved to be incapable of creating an active and reasonable policy towards the regions. At this time, the Center chose to either ignore the regional needs or to support selectively the elites in the regions (primarily republics). The Center was unable to foresee that "Center-regions" relations would become the basis and at the same time the main obstacle to the formation of a new Russian statehood.

Work on the Federation Treaty began in Russia in 1990-91 as an analogue to the Union Treaty. But the Union Treaty was overtaken by the events of August 1991 while the Federation Treaty survived. On 31 March 1992 it was signed by the subjects of the Federation (excluding Chechnya and Tatarstan)<sup>11</sup> and in April was approved by the Sixth Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation.

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tied to Moscow. For example, Yaroslav oblast, where the administration is composed entirely of "nomenclatura", nevertheless preserved complete loyalty to the President during the August 1991 putsch. Living on federal subsidies, this region can only survive with the help of the Center. (Stolitza, N34, 1992, p.8.)

- 10 The broad term "Center" means basically Moscow authorities: above all the President and his team, as well as the parliament and the federal government. After the disbanding of the parliament in October 1993, this term implies the President and those most significant statesmen (for example, E. Gaydar, V. Chernomyrdin, S. Filatov, S. Shakh-ray) who can influence the political decisions and in spite of their discords work in one team.
- 11 Chechnya, led by General D. Dudaev, insisted on an immediate split from Russia and in effect seceded, but its sovereignty was not recognized by the international community. By contrast, Tatarstan conducted a very profitable policy towards Russia. In fact, it demanded a special type of relationship - "associative" relations. During the referendum held in Tatarstan in March 1992 most of the population voted in favor of independence. Having thus opened the door, it then remained on the threshold and began to bargain with the Russian Federation, trying to get as much as possible for its further presence within Russia. These tactics were at least partially successful: Tatarstan almost stopped contributing to the federal budget but continued to get finances from the central authorities and Western investors, putting an end to the attempts to control the allocation of these financial resources. (In the past these tactics were also used in Yakutia-Sakha and Bashkortostan.)



During the preparation of the Federation Treaty, two fundamentally different concepts of Russia's federalism were put forward.

*First.* Russia is a federation of national republics with preferential rights for titular nationalities, with minimal competences of the Center and maximal competences of the local elites.

*Second.* The return to the pre-revolutionary system of provinces, i.e. the pure territorial approach, taking less account of the ethnic peculiarities of each region.

The second approach, which recognizes the vicious character of a national-territorial model, corresponds much more to the formation of a genuine federation: nationality is separated from statehood. However, in Russia this approach could definitely not be realized. To redefine the physical boundaries would immediately lead to riots in the autonomous federations. It is clear that for the foreseeable future it is absolutely imperative that there will be no change in the physical boundaries of the regions.

In reality, Russia had no real choice between these two concepts. The federation began to be built by "trial and error".

The document called the "Federation Treaty" actually includes three treaties concerning the distribution of competences between the federal government bodies and the government bodies of the three types of subjects (sovereign republics; oblast, kray, cities of federal subordination; autonomous oblast and okrug.)

For some time the Federation Treaty prevented open conflict while each region struggled to make it work.

The Treaty was more a process than a result. It fixed the past, but did not determine the future. Nobody really hoped that the Treaty would be a corrective for regional crises. Basically, the Treaty proved to be incapable of coping with three main problems:

1. It fixed the division of the subjects into three different types - each enjoying *unequal* rights. The inequality of rights of the subjects prompted regional sovereignization to increase, the regions (oblast, kray, okrug) tried to overtake the republics. This was only natural, as one of the basic principles of federalism ("symmetry" - equal rights to all components of the federation) had been disturbed.

Moreover, inequality of rights of the subjects (regions) caused inequality of human rights. Thus, the citizens of the republics enjoyed more rights than the citizens of the other regions.

2. It remained unclear what the nature of the federation was, what its basis could be: constitution or Federation Treaty? One would think that in signing the Treaties not among each other but with the Center, the subjects had recognized the authority of the constitutional source. Not at all. The demand of the republics to include the full texts of the Treaties in the Constitution proved that they considered them to be the basis of the Federation, thus paving the way to the confederation.

3. The Treaty did not clearly define the ownership of the state, of the subjects and the ownership of their joint competence, thus creating chaotic situations.

Let us examine the basis of the claims of national formation. Yes, the republics were the pioneers of Russian federalism, but they stood for the variant of pseudo-federalism which national bolshevism had imposed. By now the political pretensions of autonomies prevent the development of Russian federalism.

The only legal ground for their special status could be found in the notorious right of nations for self-determination. It assumes that every titular nation<sup>12</sup> has the formal right to secede from Russia. The republics therefore thought they were doing the Russian state a big favor by remaining inside it. Russia should be most grateful to them and by all means stress their special, honorable status.

In fact, the right for self-determination is not limited to politics and relates first of all to free development of national cultures. Only if this free development is completely unattainable within Russia can the titular nation secede. Secession is not an end in itself.

The second pillar supporting the system of privileges for autonomies is the definition of "autonomy". A territory populated by a certain (non-Russian) nation, it forms a kind of "cradle" or "nest" of a nation. The other regions do not have such a "sacred" image.

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<sup>12</sup> That is, a nation which gives its name to a particular autonomy.

Actually Russia is a multi-ethnic country with dispersed settlements of most of the nations and relatively small ethnically homogeneous areas. Nowadays, the Russian autonomies have around 26 million inhabitants, of which "titular" nations comprise only 10 million, i.e. less than 40%. Within the borders of the autonomies live only 55% of the members of the titular nations, but on the other hand they have 12 million Russians. This simple picture proves that the physical boundaries of the autonomies do not reflect the real settlement of nationalities in Russia.

Having said this, it is no wonder the Federation Treaty failed. The basic documents concerning the principles and mechanisms of its realization were never implemented.<sup>13</sup>

In the circumstances where the Center was unable to cope with the regional challenges, the leaders of the political movement "Democratic Russia" called already in 1992 for the formation of a federation from within (from the regional level), to transfer maximal rights to the regions, which should enjoy equal rights.<sup>14</sup>

It should be stressed, however, that this principle of the formation of a federation from within must be valid for *all* the subjects. The autonomous republics put forward a different idea: they (the republics) would choose to transfer certain competences to the Center, while for the administrative units the order would

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<sup>13</sup> The heads of republics and the heads of administrations expressed their disappointment with the Federation Treaty in a joint declaration on 9 March 1993, which they put forward on the first day of the Eighth (extraordinary) Congress of the People's Deputies. They stressed that the Treaty had not been implemented in practice, thus rendering elaboration of the new constitution senseless. They demanded the adoption of a special law concerning principles and mechanisms of the realization of the Treaty. This law should have determined the powers of the federal legislative, executive and legal bodies; mechanisms of interaction of federal government bodies and the bodies of the subjects of the Federation in the spheres of their exceptional and joint competence; procedure of property delimitation between the Center and the subjects; guarantees of economic rights of the subjects in the law-making activity of the Supreme Soviet and legislative activity of the subjects; terms and conditions of increasing the efficiency of the Council of Ministers and of the executive bodies in the regions. A special chapter should regulate the agenda for preparation and adoption of the new Constitution. (Rossijskaya Gazeta, N48, 12 March 1993, p.2)

<sup>14</sup> Stolitza, N34, 1992, p. 6-7.

be the opposite: the Center should transfer certain competences to them.<sup>15</sup>

Before the Eighth Congress of Deputies, the autonomous republics received most of the attention of the press and general public. The Center gave them much more consideration than the other regions.<sup>16</sup> However, from March 1993 kray and oblast began to develop their own legislative activity.<sup>17</sup> The Center perceived these first attempts by the regions to reach a balance in rights with the republics as unlawful, separatist, and leading to the split of Russia's unity. But this was a natural development, as no part of a federation likes to feel inferior. However, the continuous confrontation between the President and the parliament contributed much more to these trends.

In this situation, the President, supported by the majority of the people during the April referendum, turned to the only power which could support him in elaborating and adopting a new constitution - Russia's regions.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. The Constitutional Battles

In April-May 1993 the all-Russian Center for Investigation of Public Opinion (VZIOM) conducted an opinion poll.<sup>19</sup> They questioned 200 experts regarding the problems of the political and economic development of Russia. Most of the experts believed that Russia would preserve its identity (only 5% against). Only 26% expected separatist trends to become stronger. The experts saw the

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<sup>15</sup> Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 24 June 1993, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> This trend is proved by the creation of the Council of the Heads of the Republics (Fall 1992), headed by the President. It was supposed to form a kind of counterbalance to the Supreme Soviet, but actually contributed to the further separation of the republics from the other regions.

<sup>17</sup> The "first swallow" was an elaboration of the Constitution in the Siberian Tomsk oblast (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 20 March 1993, p.3).

<sup>18</sup> A majority of voters in 66 of Russia's 87 regions supported President Yeltsin in the April referendum (Economist, September 25, 1993, p. 34).

<sup>19</sup> Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 22, 1993, p. 5.

most likely outcome of current developments in the creation of new Federation subjects through the merging of administrative units enjoying the status of the republics - for example, Srednerusskaya, Sibirskaya, Primorskaya, Ural republics. From this relatively optimistic outlook, one result of the poll was strikingly different: only 11% of the experts considered a federative structure to be the best form for Russia's political organization. History will prove whether the experts were right in general or not, but the events of the following summer clearly showed that the federative structure of Russia represented a barrier which the Constitutional Assembly was unable to overcome.

By summer 1993, the regional development of Russia was marked by three main processes.<sup>20</sup>

1. Growing political apathy in most of the population, which neglects to participate in the formation of regional elites;

2. The return of the old "nomenclatura" to power. Only political disorder brought "outsiders" to the top of the regional hierarchy. In most of these cases such people were unable to establish themselves, to "take root" without the support of their "own" team;

3. The emerging conflict between the legislative and executive branches of power in the regions.

In general these processes revealed a very important phenomenon: the development of regional political elites, which by now had largely run its course. In other words, by summer 1993 the circle of professional politicians was almost formed in which the political struggle would occur and competences would be transferred.

No one doubted the need to adopt a new constitution for Russia. The constitution currently in force was eclectic, contained serious contradictions and did not reflect reality.

The draft of the new constitution was published on 30 April. It was examined by the subjects of the Federation and at the beginning of summer the President called for the formation of a constitutional assembly to discuss the draft, make observations

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<sup>20</sup> The analysis was carried out by the experts of the Institute of Geography (Russian Academy of Sciences). See Nezavisimaya Gazeta, June 11, 1993, p. 1-2.

and compromises.<sup>21</sup> Yeltsin especially stressed that the new constitution should be the fruit of *all* the subjects of the Federation.<sup>22</sup> It was from this time that he began to realize that the regions were the one and only force to which he could appeal in developing (and later adopting) a new constitution. However, the priority was still on the national republics.<sup>23</sup> Without any exaggeration one can state that the Constitutional Assembly worked very hard. But the idea of Russia's federative structure did not give up in spite of all the efforts - the compromise between the republics and territorial units was not achieved. Neither side was willing to give in.

I would argue that, for the most part, the way towards the new constitution was blocked by the excessive claims of the republics. In general these claims could be described as the following:

1. The republics insisted on including in the new constitution the full texts of the three Federation Treaties.

This not only would make the text of the constitution too vague, but also would stress the basic role of the Treaties and diminish the role of the Basic Law.<sup>24</sup>

2. The republics insisted on being defined as "sovereign states" in the text of the new constitution.

Such a definition leads to at least two contradictions. First, it contradicts the sovereignty of the Federation as a whole, because it is impossible to have two sovereigns covering one territory. Second, after adopting this definition one could only

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<sup>21</sup> Participants in the meetings of this body were the representatives of the regions, political parties, public movements, trade unions, leading lawyers and experts.

<sup>22</sup> Izvestia, May 7, 1993, p. 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> This was proved in particular by the visit of President Yeltsin to Yakutia-Sakha (18-19 June 1993). The President began to search for the support of the republican elites from Sakha for three reasons. First, here he got more than 70% of the votes at the April referendum; second, this republic is very significant because of its natural resources (primarily diamonds); third, the President of Sakha, M. Nikolaev, is more "pro-Yeltsin" than the other republican leaders.

<sup>24</sup> On 25 June, the day before the plenary meeting of the Constitutional Assembly, the representatives of 42 regions signed a sharp declaration with the demand to establish Russia as a *constitutional* federation. They threatened Moscow with a recall of their signatures under the Federative Treaty.

have spoken about the transformation of Russia into a confederation (also enjoying a particular structure).

Kray and oblast, naturally, protested strongly against such a definition. According to their proposals, all the subjects of the Federation should enjoy equal economic and political rights, with one exception: Kray and oblast do not need attributes of their own statehood such as flag, seal and hymn.

The claims of the republics naturally generated irritation in the regional elites. They stated firmly that if the definition of the republics as sovereign states is adopted, the other regions would immediately start to raise their status to that of republics.<sup>25</sup>

One observation is worth making. Despite the fact that President Yeltsin formally expressed his disapproval of such regional activity, it was an open secret that within his own team there was no definitive negative reaction in this respect. Moreover, it is possible that "reasonable" sovereignization in the regions was to an extent encouraged by Moscow in order to create a counter balance to the claims of the national republics.<sup>26</sup>

3. The republics rejected the formula according to which land and natural resources can be in state, private or other forms of ownership and belong to the people who live on the corresponding territories and to *all the people* of the Russian Federation.

This shows the desire of those republics rich in natural resources to keep these separate from the Federation, in order to use them individually and without any control from the Center.

4. The republics wanted to increase disproportionately their influence upon the upper chamber of the new parliament (Federation Council), demanding one half of the seats there.

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<sup>25</sup> The first signs of this were the declarations of the Vologda and Ural republics (the latter on 1 July). Primoriye (Far East), Chelyabinsk, Tula, Rostov oblast and Krasnoyarsk kray were ready to do the same. Moreover, the leaders of Irkutsk oblast proposed to the leaders of Krasnoyarsk kray to unite their territories and establish one republic. These regions belong to the richest in Siberia and actually have much in common in economic terms (Izvestia, June 23, 1993, p. 6; Izvestia, July 3, 1993, p. 2; Moscow News, August 1, 1993, p. 8).

<sup>26</sup> Moscow News, August 1, 1993, p. 8.

This would again have led to the domination of the titular nations, infringing the rights of the citizens.

In the first draft of the constitution it was stated (article 85) that national formations in Russia should not have less representation in the Federation Council than "Russian" oblast and kray, i.e. 50%, or 114 seats each. The logic which determined this decision was not very sophisticated. The "Russian" regions would have a majority (up to 75%) in the State Duma (lower chamber of the new parliament), so at least the upper chamber would be balanced. In the final draft, this article (in the new edition N94) was changed so that every subject of the Federation would send two representatives to the Federation Council. Therefore, 32 "national" subjects would receive 64 seats, and 57 kray, oblast and federal cities would together receive 114 seats.

During the meetings of the Constitutional Assembly the conflicts among the different regional types were clearly revealed. Perhaps an important result of the Assembly was to show the lines of these conflicts.

However, this development caused a lot of pessimism throughout the country. Deputy Prime Minister S. Shakhrai, who had worked tremendously hard to achieve a compromise among different regional interests, had to admit that at this point it was absolutely impossible to coordinate the principles of the federative structure between republics, kray and oblast. The only possible solution he saw was to delay these problems, leave the chapters which related to the federative structure of Russia as they were in the "old" constitution, and concentrate now on adopting a "small" constitution for the transitional period.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the "asymmetric" federation had to be preserved. Otherwise, Russia would find itself in a deadlock, for the problems of federalism would block the further development of the whole country.

At the end of the last plenary meeting of the Constitutional Assembly (12 July) the decision was made for all subjects of the Federation to discuss the draft of the constitution at their Soviets and the possibilities of adopting it. Paradoxically, however, only Soviets examined, discussed and improved a draft which practically denied the very term "Soviet".

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<sup>27</sup> Izvestia, September 15, 1993, p. 2.



It did not come as a surprise, however, that Russia's Supreme Soviet undertook a counter-attack. It sent the regions the draft of the new constitution prepared by the Constitutional Commission,<sup>28</sup> which presented a dilemma to the regional Soviets. According to the constitution in force at the time, they were required to submit the draft to the Supreme Soviet. To avoid this contradiction, the Council of the heads of the Republics on 13 August decided that work on the draft should be continued by both bodies: the Constitutional Assembly and Constitutional Commission.<sup>29</sup>

The subjects of the Federation gave a rather cool first reaction to the draft of the constitution. Such a position is understandable - neither national formations nor territorial units were satisfied with it. One sign, however, looked dangerous: In some regions all the drafts of the constitution were rejected by the local Soviets.<sup>30</sup>

Besides all these difficulties, one very important issue remained entirely unclear - the legitimate mechanism of the adoption of the new constitution. The only legitimate way of doing it - through the Congress of People's Deputies - was blocked because the Congress would not have passed the new constitution. To adopt it by a special decree of the President represented a radical and unconstitutional course.

The President chose an intermediate route, legitimate at least in part. If the subjects of the Federation had adopted the new constitution at their Soviets, this could have been something really serious, which even the Supreme Council would not have dared to ignore. That is why the hopes of the President were connected with the creation of a new superior body, the Federation Council - the collective voice of Russia's regions.

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28 For two years the Constitutional Commission has worked within the Supreme Soviet on the draft of the new Constitution.

29 It was a certain move because practically all the members of the Constitutional Commission worked also at the Constitutional Assembly.

30 For example, in Penza oblast the deputies rejected all the drafts of the constitution except the "communist" one, proposed by the deputy of the Russian Federation, J. Slobodkin (Izvestia, August 17, 1993, p. 2.)

## 5. The Federation Council

During recent years the idea of the creation of a body comprised of the representatives of the Federation Subjects was raised several times. The "old" Council of the Federation was established already on 30 January 1991 and acted under the leadership of the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, though one could hardly notice any of its activities. Later this idea sounded from below, from the regional level.

During the Eighth Congress of the People's Deputies in March 1993, 73 subjects of the Federation signed the draft of the agreement concerning the creation of the Federation Council.<sup>31</sup>

In August 1993, this idea was revived by President Yeltsin. On 12-14 August in Petrozavodsk he held the meeting of the Heads of the Republics (excluding Chechnya) and the representatives of eight regional and inter-regional associations. The President proposed to create in Russia a new superior body, stressing its *legitimate* character.<sup>32</sup> In fact, according to the plan of the President, this was to be a kind of mini-parliament, to which each subject of the Federation would delegate the leaders of the executive and legislative branches (i.e. 178 people and the President at the head). Actually, the most authoritative body could have been created, the collective voice of Russia.

In Petrozavodsk, the regional leaders reached an agreement to establish the Federation Council but only as a *consultative* body. This was reasonable, for otherwise the parliament would certainly have immediately blamed the President for the creation of anti-constitutional political structures. The parliament undertook countermeasures to prevent creation of this new body. Telegrams were sent to the Soviets at all levels, forbidding them to support the idea. For their part, the Chief of Staff S. Filatov and the

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31 Izvestia, March 27, 1993, p. 2.

32 Izvestia, August 14, 1993, p. 1.

Deputy Prime Minister S. Shakhray sent letters to the regional administrations, explaining the fruitful role of the new body.<sup>33</sup>

The President planned the Federation Council as kind of a part of the future parliament, with a powerful structure able to discuss (and probably adopt) the new constitution, as well as the Election Law, the practical mechanisms of implementing the Federation Treaty, etc.

From the beginning, the experts pointed out at least two drawbacks to such a plan:<sup>34</sup>

1. To turn the Federation Council automatically into the upper chamber of the parliament would mean replacing direct representation of the regions with regional leaders.

A federation is not a simple mosaic built of the regions put together but a deeper unity. Besides governor and chairman of the Soviet the citizens of each region should elect two representatives to the Federation Council. If local elites do not want the region to be represented in Moscow by somebody else, it simply means the undermining of parliamentarianism, the very idea of the parliament as the permanent people's representation in the Center.

Moreover, if we examine the idea of turning the Federation Council automatically into a part of the parliament, we come to the conclusion that such a system would not work. If the leaders of the regions would sit in the parliament, who would rule the regions? It is impossible to rule, for example, Yakutia or Tula oblast while periodically ruling Russia.

S. Shakhray considered it possible to find a solution - for example, to gather in Moscow once a month for five days. In principle this is true. One can even propose to rotate the sessions of the upper chamber among the regional capitals, but the

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33 Up to the beginning of September the situation was the following: 43 regions supported the idea of creating the Federation Council, 7 regions found it reasonable but without participation of the federal authorities in the word of a new body, several regions (the exact number was not determined) refused to discuss the idea (Izvestia, September 11, 1993, p. 4.)

34 See, for example, the interview with Senior Secretary of the Constitutional Commission O. Rummyantsev and his deputy V. Sheinis (Stolitza, N38, 1993, p. 6-8.)

ineffectiveness of such complicated regulations (on both regional and federal levels) would be impossible to ignore.

2. The direct inclusion of the regional leaders in the federal decision-making process, i.e. in the "ruling" of Russia, would contribute to further disintegration much more than all the regional "parades of sovereignties". The road to confederation would thereby be paved, since the primary feature of a confederation (not federation!) is the direct formation and realization of federal power through regional power.

The regional leaders felt that in general the idea of the Federation Council would respond to their needs. However, their notion of this new body was rather far from the President's proposal. The regional leaders put forward several conditions for implementing the new body.:

1. They stressed the *consultative* character of the Federation Council and rejected as anti-constitutional the intention to turn this body into the upper chamber of the parliament;

2. They insisted that the competences of this consultative body should not intersect with the competences of the federal structures, i.e. of the parliament, the President or the government;

3. They called on the parliament to adopt a special law concerning the activity of the Federation Council.

The regions wanted to create a constitutional (i.e. without opposing the parliament) but independent body. They also wanted to elect two co-chairmen from the executive and legislative branches who would be subordinate neither to the President nor to the Supreme Soviet.

One has to take into consideration the unique mentality of the majority of Russia's regional leaders. There are few real "born" politicians among them. Most are typical "nomenclatura" of the Brezhnev era, far from pure politics and entirely oriented toward economics. These leaders needed the Federation Council as a practical tool for solving very concrete economic problems.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> At the beginning of September the leaders of seven regions of the centre of Russia joined in Yaroslavl and adopted a resolution concerning the future agenda of the Federation Council. Among the most urgent questions were setting up an order in the banking system and in energy prices, and the

Actually, the Federation Council, even as a consultative body, could have contributed to the fulfillment of four main tasks:

*First.* The improvement of the basic interaction of the federal and regional authorities. Every now and then the heads of the oblast or kray administrations are ignored either by the President or by the government.

*Second.* The establishment of equal rights of the regions. For the first time the leaders of the republics, kray, oblast and okrug would have been able to meet around one table.

*Third.* The unification of executive and legislative powers within the regions. At the Council each region would have been able to speak with one voice, easing the process of compromise with other regions.

*Fourth.* The Council would also have been a school of real federalism for the regional leaders and federal authorities. They would have learned to coordinate different interests. The horizontal links between the regions would also have been stimulated.

The plans concerning the creation of the Federation Council were great - it could have been the school of federalism, the most powerful political force and the axis of Russian political development. Cruel reality put an end to these ambitions. New tactics, implemented by the President during the fall, showed that the role of the Council of the Federation in the Russian political scene remained unclear.

## 6. The "Hot Fall" of 1993

### **September: Resistance**

In summer, President Yeltsin repeatedly promised that September would be a "hot month" in Russia's politics. Contrary to what many had expected, reality showed that this was not an empty promise. On the evening of 21 September, the President appeared on

television to announce that Russia's parliament was disbanded, calling for elections of a new parliament on 11-12 December 1993.

Already from the early morning of 22 September, the reaction of Russia's regions toward this presidential decree N1400 began to take shape. According to the first information of the presidential administration, 48 governors (heads of regional administrations) immediately supported the President without any reserve. On the other hand, and not surprisingly, the information given by the "White House" (Parliament) was no less impressive - 57 regional Soviets supported the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation.<sup>36</sup> The first results announced by each side seemed to be more propaganda than "dry" statistics. One could only draw one logical conclusion - that Yeltsin was supported by the administrators of those regions where the legislative and executive bodies had different opinions with regard to events in Moscow. The political weight of those regions with "serious" leaders (these are primarily republics: Tatarstan, Yakutia-Sakha, Karelia, Komi, Kalmykia) allowed them to preserve neutrality or at least to avoid revealing their position prematurely.

All the regions were at least united on one point: they all were bored to death by the conflict between the President and the parliament and thought the two federal bodies should be elected simultaneously and as soon as possible.<sup>37</sup> One factor probably dampened the regional reaction slightly: The events in Moscow coincided with the harvest campaign, so the regional leaders were concerned more with keeping order in their territories than with coping with the challenges coming from Moscow.

Nevertheless, on 24 September, the subjects of the Federation gathered in St. Petersburg and deliberated on a document in which they demanded to put the political development in Russia under their control.<sup>38</sup> The St. Petersburg conference asked President

<sup>36</sup> Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 25, 1993, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> The governor of the Far East region (Primorje) stressed even the possibility of separating his region from Russia. Later the regional representatives in both the Urals and the Far East regions met to discuss breaking away from the Federation. (See Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 23, 1993, p. 3; International Herald Tribune, October 1, 1993, p. 2)

<sup>38</sup> Russian sources published different data on the number of participants in the St. Petersburg conference: 39 regions were represented from which 27 signed the final document (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 28, 1993, p. 1.); or 41

Yeltsin to suspend all acts issued from 21 September, 8 o'clock p.m., and to call upon the meeting of the Council of the Federation until 1 October. The conference recommended that the parliament should adopt a decision about simultaneous and pre-term elections for both the parliament and the President. Then the parliament was to announce its self-dissolution. The conference stressed that it admits realities, that the real power had passed to President Yeltsin and to the federal executive body.

The final document of the conference also stated that the Federation Council would remain a consultative body if the President and the parliament agreed on the proposed plan. If not, the subjects of the Federation were ready to issue a supplement to the Federation Treaty establishing a fundamentally new, non-consultative, commanding body.

In proposing their plan, the subjects of the Federation intended to legitimize the existing situation and to stabilize its future development. But the conference was not authoritative enough; its final document was not signed by the most powerful republics - Karelia, Yakutia-Sakha, Tatarstan, Udmurtia - which preferred to wait and be "over the skirmish".

The following days were marked by constantly increasing tensions, expressed in the blockade of the White House and extremist outrages in the center of Moscow, coming in fact close to civil war. That is why the next meeting of the subjects of the Federation was also marked by increased regional resistance to the President.

Meeting in Moscow on 30 September at the Russian Constitutional Court, the representatives of 62 subjects of the Federation demanded that the siege of the parliament building be lifted by midnight, 30 September. Otherwise, the regions (primarily Siberian) would vote to withhold tax revenues from the capital and threaten to leave Moscow without oil and gas supplies. In addition, the representatives from 45 regions signed an agreement to establish the Council of the Subjects of the Federation, whose status was practically equal to the upper chamber of the parliament. An exceptionally active role at this

meeting was played by the co-chairman of the new body, K. Ilyumzhimov, the President of Kalmykia.<sup>39</sup>

In an effort to quell the revolt, the most authoritative politicians from the "Yeltsin team" travelled to different destinations throughout the country. The Prime Minister V. Chernomyrdin flew to the city of Samara to meet with regional leaders. Y. Gaydar, Deputy Prime Minister, flew to Khabarovsk in the Far East. And S. Shakhray was due in Novosibirsk in Western Siberia for a meeting of the Siberian Council, a regional group.<sup>40</sup> Such efforts were logical, for the real threat of economic blockade naturally proceeded from rich Siberian regions. It is interesting to note, however, that these trips were the only signs of anxiety in Moscow about regional resistance. Boris Yeltsin himself conducted the consistent policy of ignoring meetings and declarations in the regions.

And, in fact, the regions proved incapable of uniting into a strong force to resist Yeltsin and his plan for a strict (to put it mildly) reform from the Center. The Russian regions were deeply separated by their mutual claims. At the same time, the fear of new elections and negativism towards the Center per se could not form the platform for joint actions. That is why this battle was lost not only by the parliament but also by the regions - in the most offensive kind of ignorance.

#### **October-November: Shaping the Federation from Above**

After the bloody night of 4-5 October the political power was concentrated in the hands of President Boris Yeltsin. With regard to the regional aspect of the political situation, he began by dismissing three regional governors (in Bryansk, Amur and Novosibirsk oblast) who had openly resisted him. On 7 October, he

<sup>39</sup> The activity of K. Ilyumzhimov is worth mentioning. In public opinion he had a stable image as a supporter of Yeltsin and as the first head of the executive power who had managed to abolish Soviets in Kalmykia. In spite of this he took an openly anti-Yeltsin position, making a speech to the deputies of the parliament and supporting A Rutskoj. Later he continued to affirm that "strict" military measures were planned from the very beginning and the mechanism of their use was carefully elaborated beforehand. (Izvestia, October 5, 1993, p. 5; October 16, 1993, p. 5.)

<sup>40</sup> International Herald Tribune, October 1, 1993, p. 2.



issued a decree, according to which the governors of Russia's regions were to be assigned and dismissed solely by the President and not determined by popular election in the regions.<sup>41</sup> Yeltsin also appointed his own representative in the Mordova republic, where there was no president at all.

The President cancelled a scheduled meeting of the Federation Council. His tactics were perfectly clear. Prior to the disbanding of the parliament this body could have been used by the President as a powerful tool to pressure the parliament. These tactics were no longer necessary. To create a political body with unclear tasks and competences was not in the President's interest. For him, it became much more convenient to deal with the regions through the traditional structures - i.e. the Council of the Heads of the Republics (for the national republics) and regular meetings (for oblast and kray). The regional leaders had not acted soon enough to establish officially the federation council.<sup>42</sup>

The October battle in Moscow changed the balance of power between Moscow and the regions. "Local elites have not yet understood they can no longer influence federal power bodies, including the President, as effectively as before," said N. Medvedev, the head of the President's department for relations with the regions.<sup>43</sup>

The President and his team did their best to consolidate and strengthen the Center, yet it is worth mentioning that the "games" with the regional elites were finished just when they should have been started - on the eve of the elections for a new legislative branch.

The "Choice of Russia", a grouping around the President and including many of Russia's most eminent statesmen, was considered to be the most powerful group in Russia's political scene. But there was the danger that the "Choice of Russia" could turn into a

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41 Izvestia, 8 October, 1993, p. 2.

42 Some of the regional leaders continued to believe that Yeltsin would return to the idea of the Federation Council. "Yeltsin, whether he likes it or not, still needs the Federation Council if he wants to make Russia a real federated state," said Vice-President of Tatarstan, V. Likhachev (The Moscow Times, October 26, 1993, p. 4.).

43 Economist, October 9, 1993, p. 28.

party of exclusive Moscow power, based on a strong Center and anti-regional.

Against this background, another party headed by Deputy Prime Minister S. Shakhray could develop into a certain antidote to centralism. This party represents a new phenomenon in Russia's political life - the "Party of Russia's Unity and Consent", which stands for the interests of the regions and proclaims the idea of federalism. The pragmatic, concrete approaches of its leaders, above all to the economic problems Russia currently faces, makes the party's program attractive. "Shakhray's" party, being in the center of Russia's political spectrum, can partially fill the political vacuum which has always existed between the radical left and right wings.<sup>44</sup> During the pre-election campaign the "Party of Russia's Unity and Consent" received 222 thousand signatures, more than the group "Choice of Russia", taking second place after the Agrarian Party.<sup>45</sup>

In his decree of 9 September Boris Yeltsin called for the purging of Russia's regional councils (or Soviets). He called upon the old ones to dissolve themselves peacefully and prepare for new elections, which were announced to take place in the period between December 1993 and March 1994. It was obvious that the

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44 The constituent assembly of the "party of regions" took place in Nishznij Novgorod in October 1993. 161 delegates from 53 regions took part in this meeting. Besides S. Shakhray, the party includes, among others, Deputy Prime Minister A. Schokhin, the President's adviser S. Stankevitch, and the Prime Minister of Buryatia V. Saganov. The party stands for "traditional" values, embodied in the slogan "Family, Property, Motherland". The economic policy of the "party of the regions" intends a tax reform in favor of the regions and address-oriented regional and social policy. The main drawback which will probably hinder the party from getting more seats in the State Duma is the lack of its mass media.

In addition, there is a certain danger in the party's strong "nationalistic" bias. One of its leaders, R. Abdulatipov, is the former chairman of the Chamber of Nationalities in the Supreme Soviet of the RF. He repeatedly stresses the uniqueness of Russia and the necessity of its Eastern orientation. The program of the party is not free of contradictions. For example, it is not yet clear how the supporters of the party will combine traditional Russian values, one of which has always been centralism, with federal ideas. See Izvestia, October 19, 1993, p. 2; Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 19, 1993, p. 1-3 and October 23, 1993, p. 1; Izvestia, November 17, 1993, p. 4.

45 Segodnya, November 9, 1993, p. 3.

massive "desovietization" campaign would not be painless. In general, events developed according to three main variants:

1. Peaceful self-dissolving of the Soviets (for example, Yakutia-Sakha, Tula and Kemerovo oblast);
2. The dissolving of the Soviets by order of the governors (Omsk, Leningrad, Vologda oblast);
3. Resistance of the Soviets to the President's decree (by 15 October, 23 Soviets still continued to consider the decree N1400 to be anti-constitutional and refused to dissolve).<sup>46</sup>

It is important to stress that Boris Yeltsin did not order elections in Russia's national republics, but "recommended" to these republics to reorganize their elected bodies. The republics' reaction to his appeal was in most cases negative (except for Yakutia-Sakha).

Yeltsin's "decree" gave the future regional parliaments the right to pass laws, which the old Soviets did not have. But all their legislative acts must be signed by the head of administration, who is appointed by Moscow. The new parliaments, to be elected only for a period of two years and to have no more than 50 deputies, would not be able to contradict federal laws, presidential decrees or government orders.

At the beginning of November, another decree followed, aiming to use the "energy of fear" in the regions caused by the events of October. The decree gives the federal government the right to use the strictest measures in case the regions refuse to transfer a certain amount of taxes to the federal government. Simultaneously, the Central Bank should "in indisputable order" take from the current accounts of the regional budgets the money due to the republican budget of the Russian Federation.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The trouble spots for Moscow were Novosibirsk, Bryansk and Amur oblast, where the President dismissed old governors and appointed new people. Nevertheless, these new people could not gain real authority because they were supported neither by the population nor by the local elites or "force" structures (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 15, 1993, p. 3.).

<sup>47</sup> Already in the beginning of Fall the problem of non-payment of taxes had become extremely acute. More than 30 regions unrightfully reduced their "tribute" to Moscow. The passive reaction of the Ministry of Finance created the impression in the regions that these activities were legitimate. The most "active" and firm non-payers are the Siberian regions and Tatarstan, Baschkortostan and Yakutia-Sakha republics (See Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 1, 1993, p. 3; Izvestia,

With his decree of 9 November Boris Yeltsin abolished the Ural republic and disbanded the Soviet of Sverdlovsk oblast. The representative of the President in this region declared that the process of equalization of the subjects of the Federation in rights could only develop by initiative from the Center, from above.<sup>48</sup>

On 12 December, not only the lower house of parliament (or Duma) was to be elected but also the upper house (Federation Assembly).<sup>49</sup> It will be elected for a period of four years and consist of two representatives from each of Russia's 87 regions and two federal cities. A candidate need only be a Russian citizen and at least 21 years old. This represents a significant change in the original plans of the President, not only because all regions will enjoy equal rights, despite the claims of national republics - this idea had already been discussed during the meetings of the Constitutional Assembly in the summer - but because in the original draft the regional representation consisted of the chairman of the regional Soviet and the governor. Now these representatives must be elected in the regions, which makes the possibilities for future development more reasonable.

Preliminary results of promotion to the Federal Assembly<sup>50</sup> allow two conclusions:

1. Not a single politician at the federal level has been registered, all candidates are representatives of the regional elites;

2. There is a lack of "alternative" candidates in the regions. The "set" of candidates remains traditional: governors (heads of administrations), the chairmen of the former regional Soviets, mayors, directors. It seems that in the provinces there

September 3, 1993, p. 1-2; Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 2, 1993, p. 3.; Izvestia, October 10, 1993, p. 3.).

48 Segodnya, November 14, 1993, p. 2.

49 The name Federation Assembly is chosen to distinguish this upper chamber of the parliament from the Federation Council, the body formed by regional leaders. In Russian the Federation Assembly and Federation Council have the same name.

50 On 12 November the deputies for the Federal Assembly were not promoted in Moscow, Chita oblast and Aga-Buryat national okrug. Chechnya, the 89th subject of the Federation, refused to organize elections (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 12, 1993, p. 1.).

are no other public figures popular enough to be registered as candidates for the Federal Assembly.

## 7. The New Constitution

On "Super Sunday" (12 December) Russians also had to vote on the new constitution, which President Yeltsin had promised would be "Russia's first truly democratic basic law." On 3 November the President met in the Kremlin with the leaders of the republics and heads of the regional administrations. In his speech the President informed the regional leaders about the prospects of the Constitutional Assembly, which basically concerned three main points: equality of the subjects of the Federation, taking the text of the subjects of the Federation Treaty out of the constitution; removal of the terms "sovereignty" and "sovereign state". Yeltsin stressed that he did not come out against the rights of the nations for self-determination, but denied the right to separate from Russia.<sup>51</sup>

This information caused sharp objections from national republics. To take them into account, a working group of 10 specialists headed by the Chief of Staff S. Filatov was formed. As a result of its activities four articles of the new constitution have taken new shape.

I will not examine here the essence of all the aspects of the new constitution but concentrate on one of them - the federative structure of Russia. In this respect I will outline the statements in the new constitution which I consider to be the most important for shaping Russia's federative structure.

1. The new constitution in fact recognizes the equality of three subjects of the federation, although it distinguishes republics (states), which have their own constitution and legislation, from other subjects possessing merely regulations and legislation. Basically, this is a play of words. The most important point is that all the subjects of the federation are equal (Art. 5, items 1, 4).

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<sup>51</sup> Izvestia, November 6, 1993, p. 2.

2. The federative structure of Russia is based on its state identity (Art. 5, item 3), which implies the prohibition of secession but does not undermine the right to self-determination for the nations in its original sense - the right for free development of the national landscape, for preservation of cultural and spiritual distinctiveness of each nation and nationality (Art. 68, items 2, 3; Art. 69).

3. The relations between the subjects of the Federation and the Center are legally grounded. The constitution clearly sets out the powers of the Federation, of its subjects, as well as the common powers of both (Art. 71, 72). In addition to these, the subjects enjoy all those powers normally accruing to a state (Art. 73), including independent legislative activity (Art. 76, items 4-6).

4. The constitution forbids the willful changing of the status of Federation subjects, stating that this can only be achieved by mutual agreement of the Russian Federation and the subjects in question (Art. 66, item 5).

5. The constitution establishes full transparency of regional internal boundaries for goods, services, and financial resources (Art. 74).

6. The subjects of the Federation establish political systems on their territories but in accordance with the constitution (Art. 77, item 1). This forms the common basis for the political system within the subjects of the Federation.

The opponents of the new constitution pointed out some drawbacks of the document. However, their observations are of a general character and not always well argued.<sup>52</sup> With regard to Russia's federative structure, there are two main observations for the new constitution.

1. The events of September-October 1993 have interrupted the evolutionary establishment of federalism in Russia from "within".

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<sup>52</sup> Basically, the opponents affirm that the constitution has been created too quickly (although it took over three years) and in complete secrecy. They also complain that this document fits only present political leaders. As soon as these figures are removed from Russia's political scene, they argue, the need for such a constitution will disappear as well. (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 3, 1993, p. 1-2.; Pravda, November 17, 1993, p. 1-2.).

The new constitution establishes a unitarian system and does not create a fair federation.<sup>53</sup>

From my point of view, this argument proceeds from false assumptions. The "evolutional establishment of Federalism in Russia" was no more than a chaotic movement to disintegrate Russia (first of all from the side of the national republics). Blackmailing the Center for more rights, they did not have the slightest idea or concept about the future organization of Russia as a whole. Never did their plans go beyond the "regional" level. Moreover, during the events of September-October 1993 the regions, separated by mutual claims, proved to be incapable of self-organization. This shows that, in the meantime, the federation in Russia can be built only by the Center.

2. The new constitution includes the ridiculous model of the national-territorial division of Russia, which preserves the "asymmetric" federation.<sup>54</sup>

In principle this is true. The new constitution recognizes the clear distinction between the national republics (states) and the other regions. But as we have noted above, this document also recognizes the equal rights of all the regional types.

This represents a considerable step forward, a step in the right direction, where the final goal is to abolish national-territorial division in Russia and introduce a purely territorial model.

At the same time, it would be naive to expect the constitution to introduce this model immediately. This can only be a long-term goal. National characteristics do exist in Russia, and they will undoubtedly influence, even determine, Russia's federative structure for many years to come. To ignore these national characteristics would be both unwise and dangerous.

One has to admit that the republics forestalled the other subjects of the Federation in their political development. They were the first to fight Russia's unitarianism and succeeded in creating significant regional self-awareness. They also accumulated significant experience in building their relationships

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53 See, for example, V. Lafitsky, "What will a cruel politician do to Russia?", Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 17, 1993, p. 1-2.

54 See, for example, A. Kibrik, "Without waiting for agony," Moscow News, November 14, 1993, p. 7.

at the federal level. This is another reason why total ignorance of their special position can easily contribute to the collapse of the country.

The new constitution is imperfect because it reflects imperfect realities. In general it shapes a constitutional federation with national characteristics - typical for Russia. In this respect it would be unrealistic to expect more at present. In the future, when the document no longer corresponds to realities, it can be corrected through the parliament in a normal, civilized procedure.

## 8. Conclusions

Four main conclusions can be derived from the analysis of current regional developments in Russia.

1. The state system of Russia which has existed up to now can be described neither as federal nor as unitarian. The new constitution and the Federation Assembly in its function as the upper chamber of parliament basically outline the shape of the Constitutional Federation as a mechanism for the expression of regional interests at the federal level.

2. The process of political development within the Russian regions (including that of a destructive character) will continue to take place; the Center will have to deal with regional political challenges every now and then. In this respect the main task of the Center should be to keep these challenges within a constitutional framework, to persuade the regions to follow the constitution as the basic law of the state.

3. It is important to develop a genuine political centrism in Russia's political culture. This cannot be reached soon. Centrism remains unusual in the current state of Russian political culture.

The centrist approach can be described as pragmatic. It assumes that people and their attitudes toward life are different, that an immanent characteristic of the world is its imperfection. Centrists do not rush to change the world according to a model they consider infallible. This is also true for federalists, who



proceed from the world's diversity. Because of this similarity, centrists are potential supporters of federal and regional concepts. The "party of regions", which I described above, is one of the first phenomena demonstrating the establishment of centrism in Russia.

4. The political course of creating a federative state should be strongly supported by economic policies. Besides general tasks such as combatting the rate of inflation, regional aspects are particularly important.

a. A deep reform of the system of tax distribution between the Center and the regions is needed. Strict measures alone, introduced by the President and the government, do not correct the situation. From the outset, taxes collected in the regions should be divided into local and federal allocations. In addition, the federal taxes should be determined through consultations between the federal bodies and each region. This is not easy, but it would make the system of tax distribution more flexible and reasonable, and therefore easier for the regions to accept. Otherwise, this field will constantly generate conflict between the Center and the regions.

b. An all-Russian concept of economic policy must be shaped and implemented. This problem is so important that it merits a separate study. Decades of underestimating the role of regional policy have led to huge gaps in the levels of socio-economic development among Russia's regions. In recent years these gaps have widened drastically due to the general deterioration of the economic situation. This contributes a great deal to the "asymmetry" of Russia's federation.

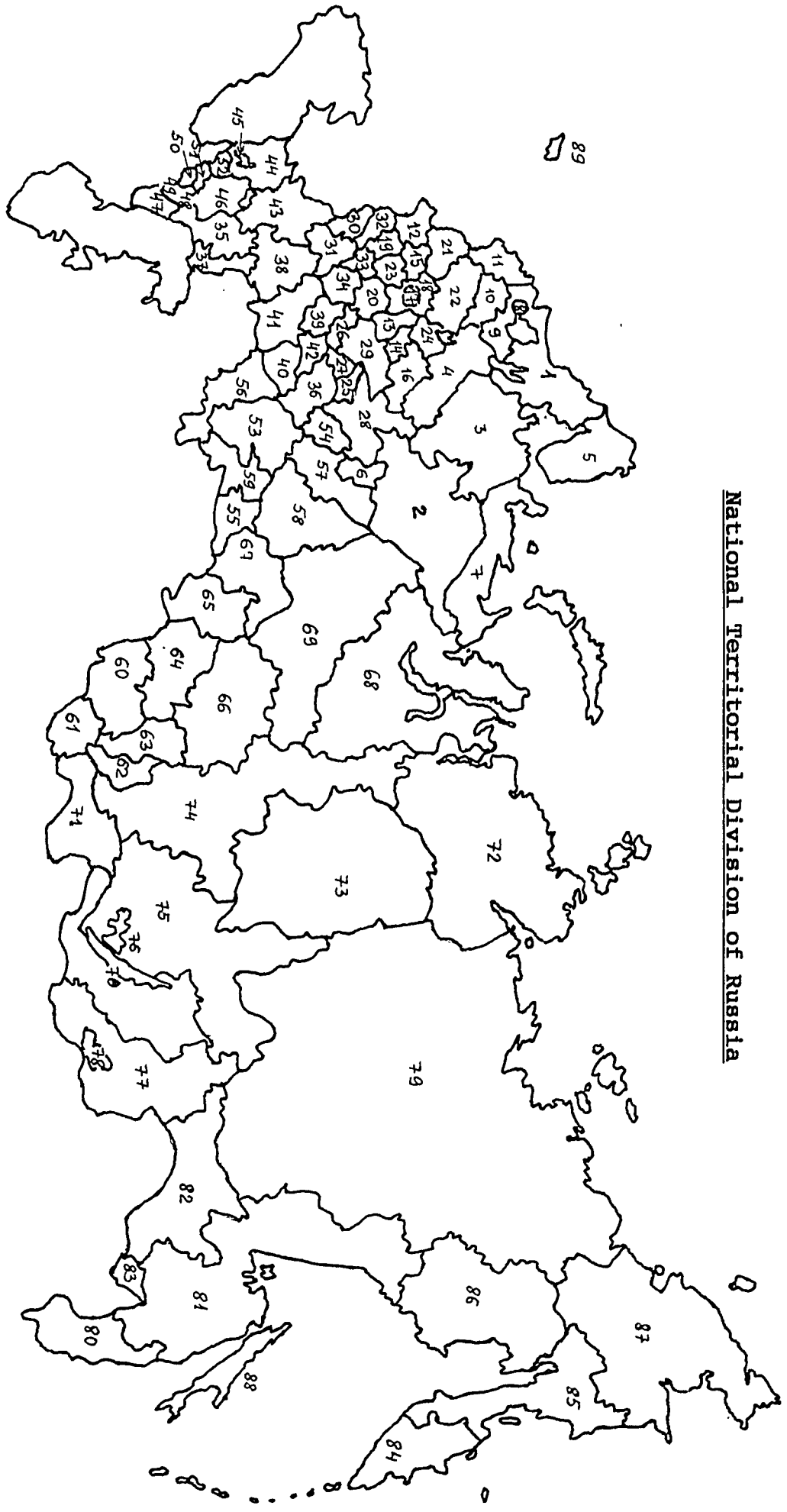
In forming Russia's regional policy concept, the very first priority should be given to stimulating investment for infrastructure. The further weakening of the links of communication can cause Russia to fall apart, like the patchwork of an old quilt, far faster than all the "separatist" movements in the regions.

For Russia today, federalism is not only a desirable course of political evolution, but an imperative. If Russia is to develop into a robust democracy, federalism as a territorial form of democracy is inevitable. Establishing democracy in the regions, giving them political competences and merging them into one state

- only this way corresponds to Russia's natural historical development. Any other course would run counter to it.

A P P E N D I X

National Territorial Division of Russia



Legend

1. Karelia republic
2. Komi republic
3. Arkhangelsk oblast
4. Vologda oblast
5. Murmansk oblast
6. Kouri-Permyak autonomous okrug
7. Nenets autonomous okrug
8. St. Petersburg
9. Leningrad oblast
10. Novgorod oblast
11. Pskov oblast
12. Bryansk oblast
13. Vladimir oblast
14. Ivanhoe oblast
15. Kaluga oblast
16. Kostroma oblast
17. Moscow
18. Moscow oblast
19. Oryool oblast
20. Ryazan oblast
21. Smolensk oblast
22. Tver oblast
23. Tula oblast
24. Yaroslavl oblast
25. Mari-Al republic
26. Mordov republic
27. Chervash republic
28. Kirov oblast
29. Nishnij Novgorod oblast
30. Belgorod oblast
31. Voronesh oblast
32. Kursk oblast
33. Lipetsk oblast
34. Tambov oblast
35. Kalmykia republic
36. Tatar republic
37. Astrachan oblast

38. Volgograd oblast
39. Penza oblast
40. Samara oblast
41. Saratov oblast
42. Ulyanovsk oblast
43. Rostov oblast
44. Krasnodar oblast
45. Adygeya republic
46. Stavropol kray
47. Dagestan republic
48. Chechen republic
49. Ingush republic
50. North Ossetia republic
51. Kabardin-Balkar republic
52. Karachay-Cherkes republic
53. Bashkir republic
54. Udmurt republic
55. Kurgan oblast
56. Orenburg oblast
57. Perm oblast
58. Sverdlovsk oblast
59. Chelyabinska oblast
60. Altay kray
61. Altay republic
62. Khakassia republic
63. Kemerovo oblast
64. Novosibirsk oblast
65. Omsk oblast
66. Tomsk oblast
67. Tyumen oblast
68. Yanal-Nenets autonomous okrug
69. Khanty-Mansi autonomous okrug
70. Buryat republic
71. Tuva republic
72. Taymyr autonomous okrug
73. Evenki autonomous okrug
74. Krasnoyarsk kray
75. Irkutsk oblast
76. Ust-Orda Buryat autonomous okrug

77. Chita oblast
78. Aga Buryat autonomous okrug
79. Yakut republic
80. Primorsky kray
81. Khabarovsk kray
82. Amur oblast
83. Yewish autonomous oblast
84. Kamchatka oblast
85. Koryak autonomous okrug
86. Magadan oblast
87. Chukchi autonomous okrug
88. Sakhalin oblast
89. Kaliningrad oblast

#### About the Author

Dr. Irina Busygina is a researcher at the Institute of Europe, Department of European integration, of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. She graduated from Moscow State University in 1988 (Faculty of Geography) and received her Ph.D. in 1992. Since then she has published articles mainly in the field of regional developments in Russia and Western Europe. She wrote this paper while she was a visiting researcher at the Division of Foreign Policy Research of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bonn in September-December 1993.

# vierteljahresberichte

## Problems of International Cooperation

Das neue Heft:

Nr. 134, Dezember 1993

Gestützt auf langjährige Insider-Erfahrung beschreibt Khalid Durán das internationale Netzwerk der islamischen Fundamentalisten. Er macht die weitgesteckten politischen Ziele, das Zusammenwirken von Parteien, Untergrundbewegungen und Staaten wie auch die Konfliktlinien innerhalb dieser "Islamistischen Internationale" sichtbar. *(Artikel in englischer Sprache)*

Türkan Karakurt denkt über Möglichkeiten nach, **das brisante Erbe der Sowjetunion**, nämlich die Proliferation von Nationalitätenkonflikten im Gebiet des aufgelösten Imperiums, politisch zu entschärfen. Sie konstatiert, daß am beschwerlichen Ausbau internationaler Konfliktregelungsmechanismen kein Weg vorbeiführt.

Hubert Frasnelli stellt die seinerzeitige **Internationalisierung der Südtirolfrage als wegweisend für die Regelung von Volksgruppenrechten** dar.

Zwischen den beiden Polen Romanze und Realpolitik verortet Michael Dauderstädt **die amerikanische Hilfe für Osteuropa**. Als eines der bemerkenswertesten Charakteristika dieser Hilfe erweist sich in seiner Analyse das starke Gewicht privater Träger.

Oliver Thränert analysiert **die neue sicherheitspolitische Situation in Europa**. Er sieht keine Anzeichen für die Herausbildung einer den Kontinent umspannenden, von demokratischen Staaten getragenen Friedenszone. Auf absehbare Zeit bleibt für ihn die NATO der verlässlichste sicherheitspolitische Anker.

Jürgen Rüländ entwickelt die These, daß traditionelle **Machtpolitik in Südostasien** weiterhin dominiert und nach dem Ende des Ost-West-Gegensatzes neue konfliktträchtige Entwicklungen in der Region begünstigt. Die Herausbildung von Zivilmacht, die dies verhindern könnte, sei nicht zu erkennen.

Joachim Boudré-Gröger zieht eine ermutigende Zwischenbilanz des nunmehr siebenjährigen Bestrebens Vietnams, **ein weiterer asiatischer "Tiger"** zu werden.

Eberhard Kienle analysiert die Lage im **Irak zwei Jahre nach dem Golfkrieg** und diskutiert Szenarien zukünftiger Entwicklungen. Das mittelfristige Anhalten des status quo erweist sich dabei als das wahrscheinlichste. Aber auch dramatischere Alternativen erscheinen realistisch.

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