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Editorial article / Редакционная статья


Russian Regions in Political Research and Identity Studies: Introducing the Issue

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Abstract. The editorial board presents an issue dedicated to the analysis of politics in the regions of Russia. Two interrelated paradigms of the political design of Russia's regional diversity are to trace — territorial and ethno-national. They have become not only options for state registration of a space diversified by political, economic and ethno-cultural grounds, but also the subject of ideological battles, including assessments and the degree of preference of management strategies and political priorities. In the political and institutional context, the regional dimension of Russia implies an emphasis on the correlation of particular features and universalizing intentions. Such a ratio of the general and the special is included in the subject pool associated with understanding and ensuring the completeness of Russia's sovereignty.

Keywords: regions of Russia, politics, identity, all-Russian identity, Russian civilization, diversity

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Регионы России в фокусе политических и идентитарных исследований: представляем номер

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Аннотация. Редакция представляет номер, посвященный анализу политики в регионах России. Прослеживаются две взаимосвязанные парадигмы политического оформления регионального разнообразия России — территориальная и этнонациональная. Они стали не только вариантами государственного оформления диверсифицированного по политическим, экономическим и этнокультурным основаниям пространства, но и предметом идейных баталий, включая оценки и степень предпочтительности управленческих стратегий и политических приоритетов. В политико-институциональном ключе региональное измерение России предполагает акцент на соотношении партикулярных особенностей и универсализирующих интенций. Подобное соотношение общего и особенного включается в предметный пул, связанный с осмыслением и обеспечением полноты суверенитета России.

Ключевые слова: регионы России, политика, идентичность, общероссийская идентичность, российская цивилизация, разнообразие

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The political coordinates of Russian civilization and Russian statehood require appealing to the regional dimension. Two mutually overlapping logics of the political configuration of Russia's regional diversity — territorial and ethno-national, were not only options for the state articulation of the politically, economically, and ethno-culturally diversified space, but also the subject of ideological battles, including assessments and the degree of preference for management strategies and political priorities. The regional dimension of Russia's political structure in a metaphysical way reflects the civilizational pattern “Civilization is, first of all, a goodwill to live together” (J. Ortega y Gasset). It is no coincidence that vast majority of Russians insist that “Russia is a special civilization” [Gorshkov 2022]. The unity of the peoples, which is characteristic of Russian civilization, reflecting its multi-confessional and

multinational character, is the basis for solidarity and cooperation: it represents a unique case of attracting other cultural and religious traditions while ensuring the specifics of the political design of the regional canvas. In political and institutional terms, Russia's regional dimension implies an emphasis on the correlation of particular features and universalizing intentions that remove the political risks of private subjectivity. Such a ratio of the general and the special is included in the subject pool associated with understanding and ensuring the fullness of Russia's sovereignty.

The presented issue focuses on these two storylines; their disclosure in the articles is associated with a variety of accents that make up the problematic canvas of the regional political process in Russia: from the goal-setting and quality of regional elites to the role of Islamic regions in the emerging Russian identity and the parameters of historical memory, from the political activity of the regional youth to the role of information technologies that transform regional political practices. Understanding the impossibility of an exhaustive presentation of the political process in Russian regions, the editorial board proposed transformations in the face of new global challenges as a research vector. The strengthening centralization of power and the emergence of common political and legal space reduced the attention of researchers to the analysis of the regional agenda and processes for a while. However, the new geopolitical challenges and significant social transformations at the local and regional levels made the regional theme relevant once again.

It is important to note that the 1990s were characterized by a significant divergence of regional socio-political and socio-economic spaces. The federal legislative framework practically did not regulate the institutional design. The variety of forming formal and informal practices in the subjects of the Russian Federation not only became a threat to the sovereignty and unity of the Russian state but also forced the federal centre to be sensitive to the demands of the regions and regional elites. To strengthen their influence on the federal centre, the regional elites created various associations of Federation subjects (including those based on the neighbourhood principle). Such processes served as the basis for the formation of various local identities — according to territorial, confessional, ethnic and other principles, but called into question the fullness of sovereignty and the unity of public power.

The noughties significantly changed the conditions for the functioning of regional polities. In course of a short period, federal districts were created (replacing the associations of regions previously created “from below”); new laws were adopted on the organization of power in the subjects of the Federation, on the reform of the Federation Council and local self-government, and political parties and elections.

This process was characterized by a fairly large number of contradictions and conflicts; however, the federal government did manage to significantly unify the regional spaces. The decision-making centre shifted towards the federal government, and the regions and their elites were forced to gradually abandon subjectivity in the process of political decision-making. The logic of political reforms and transformations was based on the ideas of the all-Russian identity and national unity.

At the same time, the federal centre in a relatively short time initiated several significant reforms, which often had different vectors (for example, on the procedure

for filling the position of the head of a federal subject). This allowed for maintaining a significant diversity in the regions due to the “different speeds” in the promotion and implementation of these innovations.

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic renewed the interest in regional features: some of the subjects of the Federation introduced conditional restrictions, others formed digital systems to control the movement of citizens or closed their borders to residents of other regions. The period of the pandemic and the restrictions associated with it significantly exacerbated the contradictions that existed in regional societies, demonstrated significant deficiencies in communication between the authorities and society and formed new factors of social tension.

The development of ICT formed a new basis for regional disengagement [Filatova, Chugunov 2022]. Some regions intensely develop the information space and implement digital technologies in socio-political spaces, creating a new public dimension — the online environment of political communication and competition. One of the leaders in this process is Moscow (online voting, the introduction of a face recognition system operated by artificial intelligence, the introduction of smart city technologies, etc.). Meanwhile, in other regions, the residents show a relatively low degree of involvement in the political agenda on online media, and the authorities prefer to focus on traditional institutions and practices.

Undoubtedly, juvenile topics are in demand both in the metaphysical and politico-institutional projections. The youth, having actively involved in conventional and non-conventional forms of protest in 2017–2021, declared themselves as a subject of politics, a significant social group. However, the decline in the interest of young people in political participation, recorded today in many regions, raises the question of finding optimal mechanisms for their involvement in constructive forms of civic activity.

This volume deals with Russian regions from the Far East to the North-West (Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg), and from the North to the South (Krasnodar). We are grateful to all our contributors; however, we would like to highlight the impact of our editorial board members (Sergey Pankratov, Olga Popova, and Elena Morozova) who represent their regions and regional schools of political research.

As the issue is entirely dedicated to the politics in Russian regions, we decided to involve the Russian Political Science Association and its regional branches with the support of the RPSA-Regions network led by Alexander Sokolov.

We start with general political problems of state-regional interactions and pan-regional issues. *Ilya Pomiguyev* and *Nikita Zaripov* from *HSE University* study the functioning of the Council of Legislators under the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation as auxiliary institutions and the «rules of the game» they form in the interaction between the Federal Assembly and the regional parliaments. *Igor Okunev* and *Vasilisa Lopatina* from *MGIMO University* find out how the socio-economic zoning affects the regional policy in Russia, compare the results of their study to the macro-regions suggested by the Strategy of Regional Development of the Russian Federation and therefore to the current administrative practices.

The chief editor of our journal *Yuri Pochta* from *RUDN University* studies the role of Islam in the formation of the all-Russian identity and clarifies the development

of federalism in the multinational and multi-confessional Russian society. Following the Islamic thread *Sergey Demidenko*, *Sergey Margulis* and *Roman Fainshmidt* from *RANEPA Academy* attempt to understand the nature of post-industrial Islamism's development in the Russian Federation.

The next chapter of the volume is dedicated to various regional cases. *Alexander Sokolov* and *Elena Isaeva* from *Demidov Yaroslavl State University* use the empirical data they collected while analyzing the regional NGOs, civil activism, and public chambers to reveal the cases of digitalization of regional and public institutions. *Daria Kazarinova* from the *RUDN University* refers to the Urals and based on a series of in-depth interviews with representatives of regional elites reveals the key problems of Permian identity and political problems of the region often treated as an 'unfinished project'.

Yurii Aksiutin from *Katanov State University of Khakassia* focuses on the national, regional and local identities of Southern Siberia republics — Khakassia, Tyva and Altai, which have by no means been stable during the last decades. *Yuri Shabaev* from *Pitirim Sorokin Syktyvkar State University* considers the problematic nature of demographic and social processes as well as the ethnocultural component of the Russian North. *Sergey Pankratov* and *Kirill Makarenko* from *Volgograd State University* identify the nature of civil and political trust between the leading actors of communication in the Volgograd region and expose the characteristics of trust/confrontation in the regional system of political communication. *Olga Popova* from *St. Petersburg State University* studies regional political elites in St. Petersburg and Leningrad region, their communication strategies, images, formal and informal ties as a part of a broader RPSA research project on Russian elites.

The last chapter of the volume is dedicated to our constant topic of youth policy in Russian regions. Two articles from *Kuban State University* refer to the case of Krasnodar. *Elena Morozova* stresses the contradictions between the growing population of the region and depleting resources for the development of human capital. *Irina Samarkina*, *Irina Miroshnichenko* and *Sergey Maltsev* examine youth activism and potential protest moods in the region, as well as the ability of regional youth policy actors to deal with them.

Mikhail Krishtal from *Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University* observes the historical memory of young people in the Kaliningrad region. He considers how the context of memory depends on the respondents' attitude towards Stalin. *Dmitry Kazantsev* from *Altai State University* analyzes the youth protest moods in social media and blogosphere, and political activism in Altai, Zabaykalsky, Primorsky and Khabarovsk Krai, and Omsk Oblast, as well as Tyva, Buryatia and Altai Republics.

Natalia Bubnova from *Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations* closes the volume by reviewing the latest book by renowned Russian historian Alexander Yanov who discusses general questions of Russian political philosophy: Russia's dual nature (both European and Asian), as well as Russia's difficult historical path in between democracy and authoritarianism.

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