

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGY IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: UNDERLYING CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

Abstract. *The article reviews the present state of interdisciplinary analysis of the conflict resolution strategy in the North Caucasus. The goal of the research is to analyse the underlying theoretical concepts, constructive methods and peacebuilding strategies for resolving ethnic tensions in the region. The collapse of the USSR, the 'sovereignisation' of ethno-political subjects of the Russian Federation, the destruction of social and economic relations, strengthening of ethno-nationalistic tendencies and religious fundamentalism have been significant factors in the imbalanced position held by the Russian regions, their disintegration of all-Russian space. This article explores the main theoretical approaches to the study of conflict resolution strategy from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. It argues that a conflict resolution strategy as a civil integration resource is tool needed to overcome the deep-rooted ethnic conflicts in the unstable North Caucasus.*

Keywords: *conflict resolution; conflict theory; regional conflict; identity-based conflict; ethnic conflict; civil integration; North Caucasus*

Introduction

This research pursues the goal of analysing how the strength of civil integration can affect conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies in the North Caucasus. The author considers the key factors of protracted ethnic conflicts and emphasises the destabilising role of the re-politicisation of ethnicity in a crisis society. The concept of ethnic 'identity-based' conflicts is a heuristic theoretical model for exploring the causes of increased ethno-religious tensions in the North Caucasus. The article focuses on the conflict resolution strategy's ability to de-escalate growing tensions and transform the protracted identity-based conflicts. The need to stimulate civil

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integration has moral and structural sources: from an ethical point of view, the creation of an inclusive society is the fundamental societal goal; structural factors relate to the need to reduce inequalities and differences leading to social fragmentation and the escalation of ethnic conflicts. Among the structural conditions of regional conflicts, the author refers to ethno-social inequalities, a civil identity crisis, ethno-political neo-authoritarianism, large-scale socio-economic polarisation, the 'ideological struggle' between secular modernisation and religious fundamentalism. When discussing conflict resolution strategies, it is necessary to consider the following: 1) the North Caucasus' peace and integration is a macro-political project whose content is determined by issues of social cohesion and civil solidarity; 2) that the way the North Caucasus has developed since the end of armed ethnic conflicts shows the inadmissibility of structural demodernisation, fundamentalism and isolationism. Today, the North Caucasus remains a crucial geopolitical macro-region as it forms the southern volatile frontier of Russia. In this case, the conflict resolution strategy must serve as an integrational and preventive tool in a conflict environment by providing structural solutions for deep-rooted cultural antagonisms, while transforming and rationalising ethno-regional contradictions.

According to D. Sandole, "There are those in conflict analysis and resolution who deal with 'startup conditions' and those who deal with process. Practitioners intervening into conflicts-as-process may deal not only initially but only with process. The problem is, once the fire has been put out, unless the underlying startup conditions – the incendiary materials – are dealt with, the fire may reoccur" (Sandole, 1998: 34). Although conflicts attracting the greatest international attention in the post-Cold War era have been those of the Transcaucasus, another area of both potential and actual turmoil is the North Caucasus. The first example of serious ethnic conflicts in the area is the war in Chechnya. However, the existence of this war, and its astonishing cruelty and devastation, has been instrumental in obscuring the other grievances found in the North Caucasus, and that hold the potential to escalate into open ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict in the North Caucasus includes a wide range of phenomena and often masks the unequal distribution of economic or political power, the religious identification of the parties, the language conflict, along with control over land and territory. Historically, ethno-political and ethno-territorial conflicts can be divided into two main categories, which overlap. The first type of destructive ethnic conflict is among the ethno-political groups of the region; the second type is conflict between ethnic communities and Russia. The biggest example of the unrest in the North Caucasus has been the short but bloody war between the Ingush and the Ossetians. Yet this war stands out for being the only one of the region's ethno-territorial conflicts to escalate into war. Among other

known problems, three issues call for special attention: “first and perhaps most pressingly, the bid for unity of the Lezgian people in Dagestan and Azerbaijan; second, the latent problem between the Turkic Karachai and the Circassian peoples in the two neighbor republics of Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria; and thirdly the condition of the most complex of all the North Caucasian republics: Dagestan” (Cornell, 1998).

In 2014, the entire North Caucasus region was estimated to contain between close to one thousand and several thousand militants (Górecki, 2014). Estimates of the number of insurgents in Chechnya vary between a few dozen or so to just over one hundred. Some experts believe they are chiefly found in the border regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia, mostly operating in these neighbouring republics. The insurgents are mainly active in Dagestan, and in previous years were also active in Ingushetia (Danish Immigration Service, 2015: 23–24). By the mid-2010s, the North Caucasus resistance movement had become religiously motivated and evolved from a local militant organisation to a branch of the worldwide militant Islamist movement (Górecki, 2014). According to M. Falkowski, the insurgents identify with the global umma – the worldwide community of Muslims – with most essential element of their present ideology being “Islamicness” (Falkowski, 2014). According to O. Bobrova and Y. Latynina, the North Caucasus differs fundamentally from the resistance movement of the Dudayev era. Secular separatism has been replaced by religiousness, the founding of an Islamic state and so-called defensive jihad, which strives to expel infidels from Muslim lands (Novaja Gazeta, 2010).

Seen from a regional perspective, the North Caucasus remains a disintegrational, unstable and conflict area in both global eyes and among most Russians. Today, the North Caucasus remains a crucially strategic and geopolitical region because it forms the southern volatile frontier of Russia. In a wider perspective, the North Caucasus is a key factor for the social stability and political integration of the whole of Russia. Russia’s communications with the Transcaucasus and, by extension, its ability to exert influence on the three independent republics of the region depend on stability in the North Caucasus. The war in Chechnya reveals Russia’s vulnerability to ethnic separatism and Islamic fundamentalism in the region. Further, it highlights the question of Russia’s survival in its present territorial structure. The latent and potential Chechen conflict is only the most prominent modern challenge to civil and ethnic peace in the region. Several serious problems need to be addressed promptly to secure the fragile, newly achieved semblance of stability in the North Caucasus. The first is the promotion of multi-level and functional macro-political integration. As Russia has not yet matured to the point of being able to effectively handle ethnic grievances, the prospects for stable peace seem dim unless open democratic institutions and

conflict resolution approaches are used to further this purpose (Cornell, 1998).

This article will try to answer the research question that reflects the hypothesis that the numerous unresolved ethnic conflicts hold implications for stability and complicate security in the region. It will argue that the ethnic 'identity-based' conflicts underpinned by deep social disintegration bring security risks for the Russian multi-ethnic North Caucasus region. The purpose is to draw conclusions based on interdisciplinary analysis of the conflict resolution strategy in the North Caucasus and try to determine how protracted ethnic conflicts can be resolved and transformed as a functional component conducive to the region's civil integration.

The hypothesis is that the conflict resolution strategy based on inclusive civil integration is a highly effective North Caucasus peacebuilding resource. Regional conflict resolution must serve as an integrational and preventive tool in the conflict environment by providing structural solutions for deep-rooted socio-cultural antagonisms, while transforming and rationalising ethno-regional contradictions. The objective is to establish how certain elements within protracted, identity-based ethnic conflicts add to the growing complexity of the region's security and its potential destabilisation. The methodological framework is based on two complementary methods: a detailed analysis of primary and secondary sources, literature, and analysis of empirical data. Reviewing ethno-political processes and issues, we will also look at the North Caucasus region's socio-cultural background for an insight into past causal connections of the deeply-rooted, identity-based conflicts.

Theoretical background, methodology and data sources

This research intends to apply a twofold methodological approach:

1. comprehensive analysis aimed at scrutinising qualitative sets of data derived from media sources, as well as scholarly publications and academic research in the field; and
2. tracing the conflict process by way of a summary of social developments leading to the current situation. By tracing the events playing a significant role in generating and escalating ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus, this study seeks to explain peacebuilding patterns and the conflict resolution strategy.

The article pursues the goal of analysing how the strength of civil integration can affect conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies in an unstable multi-ethnic region. It suggests the lack of bottom-up peace efforts at the community and civil society levels (rather than top-down state initiatives) is a major cause of the failed conflict resolution which, when combined with

the increasing state interventionism, is leading to a dramatic escalation of violence in the case under study. The main argument of this study is that the key to the growth/reduction of ethnic violence in the North Caucasus lies at the community level.

The theoretical tradition of analysing conflict resolution strategy as a political integration resource is associated with a 'conceptual antagonism' of conflict theories, multiculturalism and neo-functionalism, i.e. the contradiction arises from interpreting the essence of integration as a way of de-escalating deep-rooted ethnic conflicts in pluralistic societies. Conflict theorists refer to the analysis of the conflict specifics of ethnicity, multiculturalists rely on the normative essence of ascriptive ethnic identification, and neo-functionalists interpret the status and civil rights of ethnic groups in terms of equal opportunities and integration imperativeness. Any comprehensive theory of ethnic conflict must explain why ethnic relations based on peace and integration are more typical than widespread violence, despite serious tensions (Rothman, 1997). According to J. Burton:

Conflict resolution has been a neglected subject. It is a challenge to all existing capitalist, communist, or other systems. It is a process that can deal with complex situations, both national and international. Its interactive analytical problem-solving processes have been tested and show enormous promise. But the resolution of particular conflicts is just a small beginning. While it helps to provide insights into the nature of conflict and conditions that stimulate conflict, by itself it does not deal with the problem of conflict. Conflict prevention is the goal. Both are part of a process of system change, and their theoretical framework points political systems in the directions required. (Burton, 1990: 46)

More recently, scholars have tried to better understand the negotiation and conflict resolution dynamics in civil, ethnic, religious and regional conflicts where the parties have turned to negotiated approaches to resolve their differences even after prolonged fighting. Unlike those in the past, most conflicts of the last decade of the 20th century ended in negotiated settlements, usually assisted by a third party (Babbitt, 2009). Various explanations have been offered to explain this recent trend. According to R. Licklider, "We have some evidence that long civil wars are disproportionately likely to be ended with negotiated settlements rather than military victory. This is plausible since a long civil war means that neither side has been able to achieve a military victory" (Licklider, 2005: 39). Many of the civil and regional disputes that ended in the late 1980s and early 1990s were relatively extended affairs, having been aided and propelled by the two superpowers. The desire to end these so-called proxy wars as the Cold War was

winding down encouraged the superpowers to pursue negotiated solutions to allow them to exit because continuation had become increasingly costly (Crocker, 1992; Weiss, 1996).

In conflict resolution theory, an important assumption is that although parties may identify specific issues as the causes of the conflict, conflict also reflects subjective, phenomenological and social fractures. Consequently, analysing 'interests' may be less useful than identifying the underlying needs that govern each identity group's perception of the conflict (Burton, 1987; Lederach, 1995; Kelman, 1996, 2008). The seminal research on intergroup relations is decades old, but its insights were 'discovered' for the first time by political analysts grappling with internal ethnic wars. This included a fresh look at prejudice reduction and social categorisation studies (Allport, 1954; Brewer and Gaertner, 2004; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006) as well as research on identity formation - ethnic, religious, racial, tribal (Laitin, 1998; Appleby 2000; Marshall and Gurr, 2005). In an identity-based conflict approach, the ethnic identity is considered a basic human need, while the group identity's threat is seen as one of group safety risk (Burton, 1990; Rothman and Alberstein, 2013). Moreover, two key needs are distinguished: the need for identity and need for safety. According to J. Rothman, irrationality, deep subjectivity and uncontrollability are crucial attributes of identity-based conflicts (Rothman, 1997). Motives for ethno-confessional groups becoming involved in deep-rooted, identity-based conflicts will affect the solution possibilities of such conflicts; for the sake of satisfying their material interests, people would hardly willingly risk their lives. In ethno-secessionist conflicts, at least one side can be identified as belonging to a culturally distinct (ethnic/religious) group or at least mobilised on behalf of this group. The North Caucasian conflicts belong to this category. Cases of ethnic conflicts in their 'pure form' - with one group acting against another due to some 'natural' hostility - are rarely encountered, although as violence escalates ethnic or religious affiliation can emerge as the sole elective principle in the choice of victims (Tishkov, 2001).

As J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk and I. Zartman explain, conflict resolution is a "vibrant, interdisciplinary field where theory and practice pace real-world events" (Bercovitch, Kremenyuk and Zartman, 2009). They further note: "scholars working on CR study the phenomenon of conflict and analyse ways to bring it under control, bringing their insights and concepts to bear on actual conflicts, be they domestic or international, so as to foster better and more effective relations between states and people. Conflict Resolution is about ideas, theories, and methods that can improve our understanding of conflict and our collective practice of reduction in violence and enhancement of political processes for harmonizing interests" (Bercovitch, Kremenyuk and Zartman, 2009: 1).

Interdisciplinary methodology allows conflict/integration dialectics to be analysed as an integral phenomenon conditioned by a diversity of social, historical, ethnic, cultural and political factors. When studying the structural causes of ethnic tension escalation in the North Caucasus, an important methodological basis is the concept of identity-based conflicts by J. Burton and J. Rothman. It allows determining the identities of conflicts as social ones by their form (occurring between social subjects of various levels) and as ideological conflicts by their content, relying on cultural distinctions (Rothman, 1997). Conflict resolution theory focuses attention on political integration's capacity to transform the destructive identity-based conflicts into constructive conflicts of interest: the integration is interpreted as a method for resolving the group controversies by making the ethnic identity a non-political concept.

Resolving one conflict, however, does not prevent the next one. Conflict resolution, unlike dispute settlement, is not primarily or even mainly concerned with particular cases. Its processes are analytical and problem-solving, and its approach is within a theoretical framework or explanation of conflict. Its main thrust is, therefore, not merely in conflict prevention, in isolating and removing the sources of conflict, but also in conflict 'prevention': promoting the conditions that create cooperative relationships. (Burton, 1990a, b; Burton and Dukes, 1990a, b)

If we wish to successfully discover the causes of ethnic identity-based conflicts, we must start with a definition that will lead to constructive conflict resolution methods. We consider ethnic identity as a self-perception that is filled with a 'cultural formulae'. These cultural formulae is based on basic needs and inner preferences, group characteristics and collective values (J. Rothman). Cultural 'hyper-identity' may be group or inter-group in ethnic conflicts, yet, it is always a source of negative cultural stereotypes and a conflict catalyst. The parties may perceive themselves as personal 'maximisers', while protecting individual values, pursuing their own interests and expressing individual needs; they may be ethnic groups and feel like they are part of a collective whole; they may feel like they are carriers of multiple identities and become involved in a conflict at the inter-group level. These perceptions are generated by the cultural formulae and ethnic hyper-identity, which becomes a value-ideological basis of conflict parties and is filled with personal, group and inter-group emotions and meanings (Rothman and Alberstein, 2013).

Conflict Resolution Strategy as a Political Integration Resource

According to J. Burton:

Civilizations are at a critical stage, perhaps more critical than at any past stage. The past, from feudal times to modern industrial society, has been a consistent one of power politics. Indeed, even in the United States there has not been yet the movement required to abolish the essence of slavery. It has merely altered in form. There is no need any more for entrepreneurs to own and lock up slaves. They are there in their thousands in ghettos throughout the country, available at rates far below that which would be required to avoid malnutrition. They cannot run away, there is nowhere to go. Those who try to break out of the ghetto, by stealing or as entrepreneurs peddling drugs, are locked up in prison. It is important to place present conditions in a human perspective: serfdom in one of its many forms is still with us. Until we can get rid of it there will be violence and conflict. (Burton, 1990b)

One of the first Russian concepts of conflict resolution in the North Caucasus emerged from V. Tishkov's ethnological analysis of the Chechen conflict settlement. V. Tishkov states that:

The instability in Chechnya and the adjacent North Caucasian lands, as well as the crisis of Russia's statehood in the period of its deep transformation, generate large-scale violence on a routine everyday basis with poor prospects for stability and reconstruction. Before starting major reconstruction programs something should be done to bring into political and public discourse the attitudes which clean the road of the conflict and do not close the door for the Chechens to exercise these shared identities. There is no Russia-Chechnya' identity disposition. Otherwise, Chechens are excluded from the country's populace justifying not only atrocities on the part of the military but also a politics of caging representatives of the whole group into a category of 'no-citizens' or 'enemy citizens' without rights and privileges. This is an impossible start for post-conflict reconstruction. (Tishkov, 2001: 50)

M. Kramer described the most destructive North Caucasian conflict in Chechnya as a stalemate, since rebels "continued to inflict enough damage on Russian soldiers to erode their morale and create the appearance of an endless, unwinnable war" (Kramer, 2004: 12), but in 2006 the Russian government claimed the war had been won and the rebels routed (Baev, 2006). However, as the war was winding down in Chechnya after 2004, the conflict intensified

in the region as a whole (Markedonov, 2010). By 2009, significantly more violent events were occurring in Ingushetia and Dagestan, the republics adjoining Chechnya to the west and to the east (Mendelson, Malarkey and Moore, 2010; Howard, 2011; Kuchins, Malarkey and Markedonov, 2011). In a region where the biggest concern of ordinary people is economic insecurity and corruption is rife and barely concealed, many young men have turned to radical Islam (Markedonov, 2010; Gerber and Mendelson, 2009). The attacks made by state forces on Islamists have furthered radicalised many and produced a tit-for-tat violent upsurge by local military jama'ats (militant Islamic communities) who increasingly attack organs of the Russian state and their local representatives (police, military and political figures) (Kuchins, Malarkey and Markedonov, 2011). By 2008, the Chechen rebel leadership was integrating its separate military campaign with the wider opposition to Russian presence in the region under the aegis of the "Caucasian Front" This latest chapter in North Caucasian conflicts has not yet reached its dénouement, although predictions of wider and deeper conflicts are common, despite the President having declared the end of "counter-terrorism actions" in Chechnya in 2009 (Zhukov, 2012; O'Loughlin and Witmer, 2012).

The acceleration of socio-political disintegration amplifies the ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, intolerance, isolation tendencies and ethno-political regionalisation of the North Caucasus, while triggering anomy, apathy, inactivity, and encouraging followers of radical ideologies on ethno-political and religious extremism. Xenophobic and nationalist ideas are widespread in Russian society. The slogan "Russia for Russians!" is in one way or another supported by the majority of people interviewed since the start of the millennium; in 2011, 58% of interviewees supported the notion (Levada-Tsentr, 2011). According to S. Janković and A. Kubiček:

Ethnic and national are substantially related, mutually dependent and reversibly associated categories of identification, reflected as a prism that compounds particular sorting and ordering the social world in accordance with the moral projection, and thus, interests of particular group. Thus a major form of their intertwining might be found not in mutually exclusive dualism between 'ethnic' and 'civic' nationalism, but more closely in conflation and embroidering of 'ethnic' elements into etatistic conceptions, that – through particular (de)politicisation, creates a diverging framework, i.e. internal and external ordering principles of a 'national', political community. For these reasons, the issue of trans-substantiation of ethno-national is especially important on the level of production of group-self-identification and moral qualifications contained within it, as it reflects the valid composition of political communities. (Janković and Kubiček, 2016: 560)

Putting anti-conflict and civil mechanisms of political integration into practice is associated with the need to develop a secular and supra-ethnic model of macrosocial consolidation that supports cross-ethnic cooperation and cross-cultural dialogue. As a process of supporting and promoting civil institutions and giving ethno-confessional groups possibilities to cooperate on a non-conflict basis and according to the principles of safety and equality, political integration is becoming the primary method for resolving regional ethnic conflicts. According to J. O'Loughlin and F. Witmer:

The conflicts in the North Caucasus have evolved from a frontline in Grozny, the Chechen republic, in the early stages of the war in 1999–2000 to a scattered pattern of guerrilla warfare on Russian forces and local allies by a myriad of locally-based rebels as this pattern of fragmentation is evident in the local violence density scores and maps after 2006. What remains uncertain though is why this fragmented pattern has developed and is intensifying? What accounts for the fact that one community has produced a mobilised anti-Russian population while adjoining and similar communities remain quiescent? In these differences lie a real aim of disaggregated study of civil war, one that must take the local context of such activity much more seriously. (O'Loughlin and Witmer, 2012: 201)

The specific way ethnic identity-based conflicts threaten and challenge the integration of the North Caucasus is by bringing about a collision of competing values and ethnic identities. The idea of a value-oriented collision clarifies the concept of a regional conflict as an identity-based conflict, emphasising the systemic and genetic nature of this explanatory model. From the structural point of view, regional conflicts appear as an effect of the escalation of ethno-confessional contradictions between Islam and Christianity, social inequalities and ethnic mobilisation, threatening political integration into a polyethnic society. Internal conflicts in contemporary Russia are obviously becoming ethno-religious in nature. Over half of all civil conflicts since World War II may be classified as ethnic or religious. The identification of an ethnic conflict as an anti-governmental rebellion by an ethnic group is grounds for classifying it as an ethno-regional internal conflict (Fearon and Laitin, 1996). Upon a spike in 'internal' wars following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, then-UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued the UN Agenda for Peace in 1992. The report identified four overarching tasks for the UN and others: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. These proposed goals introduced a broader conflict resolution research and policy agenda, beyond a simple emphasis on strategic bargaining and deal-making. It

effectively extended conflict resolution concerns regarding both latent and active conflicts and the increasingly difficult challenge of rebuilding so-called failed or failing states. In doing so, it called for understanding of the conflict dynamics within and between identity groups as well as governments and an exploration of how relationships between such groups could be sustainably transformed – beyond negotiated settlements – such that violence would not recur.

Political integration falls into a class of policy problems J. Chapman described as “messes”. Chapman characterises policy ‘messes’ thus: messes are where there is no clear agreement on exactly what the problem is along with uncertainty and ambiguity on how improvements might be made, and they are unlimited concerning the time and resources they could absorb, the scope of enquiry needed to understand and resolve them, and number of people who may need to be involved (Chapman, 2002). Policy ‘messes’ founded on complex systems may also be distinguished by a variety of perspectives on the problem, which stem from the different mental frameworks used by the stakeholders. These perspectives are not limited to differences in academic disciplines, but may also arise from “different contexts, different cultures, different histories, different aspirations and different allegiances” (Chapman, 2002: 31). As a result, the stakeholders may not agree on the nature of the problem or may dismiss as irrelevant differing perspectives on it which do not fit with their frame of reference. For this reason, it is seldom possible to approach a policy ‘mess’ using a linear or rational model of policy- or decision-making since there is never a single, correct way to address it.

According to N. Skocajic Juvan and A. Grizold,

Regional cooperation based on solid legal and operational measures and the exchange of information in the external dimension of counter-terrorism is crucial in the fight against foreign terrorist fighters, the financing of terrorism, the combat and prevention of radicalisation, reinforced border checks and illegal trafficking of firearms. (Skocajic Juvan and Grizold, 2017: 260)

Regional integration reduces ethnic tension, which is associated with a high level of solidarity and safety, lower ethno-confessional mobilisation and the reduced negative stereotyping of ‘others’ as ‘cultural enemies’. While analysing the status of religion and ethnicity in the dynamics of regional conflicts, one should consider the relationship between group identities and the primordial values of closed traditional societies where civic self-awareness and individualism play no evident ideological role. Currently, such societies may function in the globalised world by means of preserving their own culture, based on collective values; group identification is

correlated within such collectives with ethnic values and religious traditions. According to J. Rothman and M. Alberstein, in the setting of an ethnic group-wide collision in the process of conflict mediation an appeal to individual interests cannot repair a crack that appears due to ethno-confessional contradictions; attempts to manipulate groups may lead to identity-based conflict (J. Rothman and M. Alberstein, 2013).

Even if a society has not experienced recent conflict, W. Kymlicka suggests the too-rapid introduction of liberal multiculturalism policies (or interculturalism or diversity policies as others prefer to call them) may carry the risk of destabilisation. He notes: "Liberal multiculturalism is easier to adopt where liberal democracy is already well established, and where the rule of law and human rights are well protected. In countries where these basic foundations of liberal democracy are not yet present or consolidated, some level of democratisation and liberalisation may be needed before it makes sense to push for the full implementation of liberal multiculturalism" (Kymlicka, 2007: 8). He points out that international organisations must sometimes strike a delicate balance between justice for ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples and overall security fears about the destabilising effects of ethnic politics on democracy and development (Kymlicka, 2007: 9). While he believes liberal multiculturalism policies can contribute to freedom, equality and democracy, he urges policymakers to understand the context in which they are being introduced: "The underlying conditions, the nature of the ethnic groups involved, and the types of policies being considered" (Kymlicka, 2007: 19).

According to E. Babbitt:

Negotiation and conflict resolution concepts provide powerful lenses through which to assess conflict dynamics and design appropriate strategies for moving these dynamics in a constructive direction. The biggest challenge in building bridges to policy is in transferring not only the checklist of 'best practices' but also the essence of analysing international relationships through the conflict resolution lens. We have made good progress in this direction to date, and the signs are promising for the collaboration between theory and practice to deepen in the next decade. The prerequisites of such collaboration include the ability of governments to admit that they do not have all the answers and can learn better ways of dealing with conflict and for scholars to fully appreciate the constraints under which policy makers are operating and gear their analysis to these realities. (Babbitt, 2011: 54)

Ethnic 'identity-based' conflict has its own unique traits, with some being more evident than others, although they all are common denominators of

the genesis of such conflict. The primordial approach helps explain the conflictogenic nature of ethnicity and fundamentalism; the concept of ethno-confessional entrepreneurs explains how institutional factors and ethnic stereotypes interact. Ethnicity and religion are the embodiment of a powerful emotional stress that may be re-activated, provided the groups are aware of a threat to their ethnicity, religious values and interests, which leads to ethnification, ethnic intolerance and, ultimately, a violent ethnic conflict (Blagojevic, 2009).

As violence increases, the security dilemma will become more acute and the desire for peaceful and cooperative strategies of conflict management will weaken (Lake and Rothchild, 1996). This will tend to thwart the prospects of successful negotiations unless instruments of outright strategic leverage and coercive diplomacy can be found (Corbin, 1994; Hampson, 1996). Once violence has reached a threshold at which no further escalation can occur without major costs, the disputants may be willing to consider other alternatives than the use of force. However, some conflicts end up stuck somewhere in the middle of the escalation curve, i.e., violence is ongoing and episodic but insufficient to make the idea of a political solution an attractive alternative. Such conflicts are sometimes referred to as 'protracted' or 'intractable conflicts' because they are marked by self-sustaining patterns of hostility and violence; they have multiple sources or causes - including greed, self-interest, security dilemmas, and bad neighbours or neighbourhoods - and there is no apparent end in sight to violence. Lacking any apparent deadline, impending disaster, or sense of time shifting to the other side's advantage, these conflicts can be sustained for years unless others intervene and encourage the parties to change their strategic calculus and consider their negotiation options (Crocker, Hampson and Aall, 2004; Babbitt, 2011).

Integration Policy and Conflict Resolution Strategy

As risk factors in the North Caucasus and the Chechen republic, V. Tishkov notes the absence of a consistent and well-funded Russian state policy of post-conflict reconstruction; political disintegration, alienation and social disorientation of the civilian population; widespread human rights abuses; internationalisation of ethnic conflicts and external support for separatists (Tishkov, 2001). Protracted conflicts are a consequence of the re-actualisation and radicalisation of politicised ethnicities. Social inequalities, fragmentations and polarisations serve as systemic factors that determine the acuity of ethnic tension and escalation of identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus. The analysis of the escalating social tension and mobilisation of cultural identity indicates the destructive impact of the factors

of ethno-religious intolerance and political disintegration in the region. Identity-based conflicts entail not only an armed or political and legal stand-off, but also conflicts of different historiosophies, historical and cultural values and symbols. This gives rise to the phenomenon of 'competing cultural and historical traditions', typically such antagonisms of religious or ethnic traditions within a multinational society concern 'historical heritage' (constructionists state, not without reason, that there are not any objective historical facts per se, they are instead a product of the interpretation of those with more or less rights to the legitimate declaraton of such facts) or conflicts between traditions of representatives of different social groups. Bitter rivalry among religious as well as ethnic traditions is possible in a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic society; opposition of regional traditions, the struggle to determine the essence of the conflict and establish the causes of such conflict etc. Such a 'war of interpretations', fought with the help of one selected subset of historical facts or another, is becoming the prologue for acute conflicts on a global scale.

Regional identity-based conflicts are dangerous in the way their genesis and dynamics entail social dissatisfaction that is highly politicised; and the action of extremism and violence implies concentrating aggressive potential at the point of ethnic intolerance and confessional irreconcilability. The degree of violence in identity-based conflicts is determined by the intensity of inter-ethnic tension and social dissatisfaction, with the scope of institutional support and political mobilisation providing the conditions for armed confrontation. According to V. Dudouet:

Although non-state armed groups represent primary stake-holders in contemporary political conflicts, there is still little understanding among policy-makers or scholars of the internal drivers and dynamics which shape their radicalization and de-radicalization processes. For instance, one often hears the assertion that bringing rebel leaders and so-called 'spoilers' to the negotiation table or converting them into peaceful politicians requires weakening, splintering, or completely dismantling their militant structures. (Dudouet, 2012: 96)

The fundamental obstacles to resolving ethno-regional conflicts – and the biggest factors contributing to insurgency – remain political disintegration, social inequalities and corruption at all levels of the state administration. This increases the citizens' alienation from the state and promotes the search for radical alternatives, including the Islamic State (ISIS) and jihad. In recent years, deep social frustration has been a major conflict driver. The authorities are perceived as unable to solve either structural concerns or day-to-day problems. Many feel that local elites have privatised the state. Those

who want better services try to leave, increasing pressure on the neighbouring regions and Russia's bigger cities. The situation is further complicated by alternative concepts of ethnopolitics and statehood. Islamists instrumentalise social problems and offer a non-democratic state based on Sharia (Islamic law) they say would be better equipped to deliver social justice. The growing political disintegration, unresolved social problems and ineffective institutions all add significantly to the appeal of radical ethno-nationalism and Islamist ideology, erode trust in the state and constitute a key reason the North Caucasian conflicts are so difficult to resolve.

Realistic and achievable goals of conflict resolution as a political integration resource in the North Caucasus are:

1. Strengthening the rule of law and protecting human rights.
2. Democratisation and meeting people's basic needs.
3. Ensuring personal security for the people of the North Caucasus.
4. Building civil society and ensuring socio-economic development.
5. Improving the relations among North Caucasus ethnicities and wider Russian society.

Policymakers and conflict resolution practitioners still tend to overlook or dismiss research findings. In part, this is because of the inevitable differences in professional cultures between academia and the 'real world' (e.g. different professional languages, incentive structures, time horizons for results). In order for good research to inform effective practice, greater links between the two must be established. Such links could be strengthened in three ways:

1. Cross-cultural emissaries – individual diplomats who read and follow conflict resolution research ideas and scholarship and can then convey such ideas to their counterparts.
2. Bridging institutions – think tanks at which conflict resolution research can be digested and translated into policy language.
3. Professional schools of international affairs – the next generation of policymakers exposed to conflict resolution research ideas in their graduate education and then taking these ideas with them into practice (Babbitt, 2011).

A problem-solving workshop is one type of third-party assisted dialogue taken by both official and non-governmental actors. This activity is directed at ethnic, racial or religious groups in a hostile relationship. Like 'circum-negotiation', this dialogue occurs at a quasi-official level around or prior to a formal peace process (Saunders, 1996). Dialogue is directed at both officials and civic leaders, including heads of local non-governmental organisations, community developers, health officials, refugee camp leaders, ethnic religious leaders, intellectuals, and academics. This dialogue process can be assisted by specialised training programmes directed at exploring

ways to establish and build relationships, furthering proficiency in facilitation, mediation, and brokering, data collection, fact-finding, and other kinds of cooperative decision-making (Babbitt, 2011). As L. Kriesberg notes, much of this activity seeks to develop “constituency support for peace efforts” (Kriesberg, 1996: 228).

Conclusion

The need to stimulate political integration arises from moral and structural causes: from an ethical point of view, the creation of an inclusive society is the fundamental goal of society; structural factors relate to the need to reduce inequalities and differences leading to social fragmentation and any escalation of destructive ethnic conflicts. When discussing the conflict resolution strategy as a political integration resource, it is necessary to consider the following: 1) North Caucasus integration is a macro-political project whose content is determined by issues of social cohesion and civil solidarity; 2) the North Caucasus’ development since the end of armed ethnic conflict shows the negative impact of structural demodernisation, fundamentalism and cultural isolationism. Today, the North Caucasus remains a crucial geopolitical macro-region as it forms the southern volatile frontier of Russia. In this case, the conflict resolution strategy must serve as an integrational and preventive tool in the conflict environment by providing structural solutions for the deep-rooted socio-cultural antagonisms, while transforming and rationalising ethno-regional contradictions.

All of these issues merit further analysis using complementary methodologies that offer a more independent perspective on ethno-regional conflict dynamics. In particular, the findings gathered here call for more in-depth research on the boundaries between political integration/conflict resolution strategies and different forms of ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus; the internal dynamics and decision-making involved in shifting goals and strategies; and their various implications for ethno-religious radicalisation and political integration processes. There also needs to be more developed interdisciplinary investigation of the linkages between conflict resolution strategy, social cohesion, political integration, negotiations, democratic transitions, and post-conflict institutionalisation. Finally, such analysis might offer useful lessons for constructive international engagement to support the conversion of state challengers into active peace-builders so long as these actors are politically motivated movements enjoying strong social legitimacy that aspire to take part in democratic politics. Indeed, our findings invite a rethinking of conventional intervention in ethno-political conflicts, promoting social cohesion and political integration during the negotiations; offering assistance to support democratic transitions in the

North Caucasus that possess a future role within a peaceful environment, in contrast to criminalisation strategies (e.g. via anti-terrorist measures such as proscription and counter-insurgency) which prevent ethnic groups from expanding their civil capacities.

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