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### **Resolving Identity-based Conflicts in the North Caucasus: Pathway to Ethnic Peace and Civic Solidarity**

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#### **Abstract**

Identity-based conflicts as a type of destructive ethnic conflicts have become a considerable obstacle to post-Soviet modernization, socio-political integration and ethnic peace in the current decade. The interest in the concept of identity-based conflict has been increasing worldwide during the first decade of the 21-st century. Identity-based conflicts are a notable phenomenon in the post-traditional world, where rational and irrational motives fancifully intertwine in politics, social structures, culture and everyday life of common people. Ethno-political identity became a prism for studying the problem of security in multi-ethnic communities. A rapid strengthening of hyper-ethnic, competing identities in Russian multi-ethnic regions occurred in two post-Soviet decades. It was manifested in the demands of ethno-political sovereignty, ethno-centrism, national-cultural autonomy, secession, as well as in the substantial growth of tension in ethnic relations, which resulted in protracted identity-based conflicts. The reduction of the role of civic identification, the growth of ethno-religious radicalism, new realities in ethnic and political life, new global rivalries, unstable processes of modernization in Russian regions were significant factors of the emergence of a large number of identity-based conflicts, ethno-political destabilization and social instability. In this case, conflict resolution in the North Caucasus may be built on the principles of civic solidarity and socio-political integration but not on the assimilation policy and suppression of ethnicities.

*Keywords:* identity-based conflicts, ethnic peace, integration, solidarity, conflict resolution, the North Caucasus

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#### **1. Introduction**

Threats and challenges to meta-ethnic and civic integration in post-traditional Russia and the risks of destabilization of political institutions are to a large extent linked to destructive identity-based conflicts. Such conflicts are caused by the effects of globalization and regionalization of ethnic cultures, eruption of ethno-traditionalist ideologies and ethno-political tensions. Ambivalent processes of conflict and consolidation based on active changes of ethno-social identities are typical for periods of structural transformations of modern societies. We are the witnesses of the emergence and decline of many civic and ethno-regional identities in the post-traditional world. Rapid changes in identities threaten the integrity of nation states. Thus, the category of identity became an important point of socio-political integration and global security. “Despite the encroachment of some unfavourable trends such as class polarization and persistent local particularities of cultures, socio-economic and political globalization forces together increase exposure to values which approach universal adoption, such as respect and moderation. Because such universal values develop into a common medium as a basis for non-violent communication

between nation-states, a common peaceful disposition is nurtured among national leaders who are then less likely to resort to arms in times of crisis” [4].

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

The problem of socio-political integration of regional communities is one of the relevant in theoretical, methodological and practical aspects. This is due to the fundamental status of the integration problems in the political and social sciences as well as to the search for new integration resources and mechanisms for resolving cultural conflicts. Post-Soviet transformations conditioned the crisis of values and institutions of social consolidation. The relevance of studying the anti-conflict potential of social integration in the North Caucasus is caused by the necessity to elaborate the new metaethnic models of consolidation forming the civic identity and supporting the cross-cultural dialogue and ethnic cooperation. Socio-political integration as a process of supporting and promoting the civic values, identities, institutions and enabling all social subjects to participate in political life on the basis of principles of justice and equal rights becomes the major method of resolving identity-based conflicts. Integration eliminates the process of mechanic consolidation based on the force of assimilatory compulsion and suppression of cultural distinctions in a repressive attempt to impose a unified identity.

## **2. Methodology and concepts**

The term "identity-based conflicts" appeared in the works of J. Burton and J. Rothman in 1990s [7; 8]. In J. Burton's works, identity is regarded as one of the basic human needs, and the perceived threat to cultural identity of a group is regarded by group members as a major threat to their security. In this aspect, J. Burton outlined two fundamental needs - the need for identity and the need for security. According to J. Burton, existing tensions might potentially evolve into deep-rooted conflicts that rest on underlying needs that cannot be compromised, and where interests and positions are deemed non-negotiable.

In J. Rothman's studies, the essential element of conflicts of identities is human subjectivity. According to J. Rothman, in identity-based conflicts, where the main issues are often threatened or frustrated needs and values, deep internal consensus may be forged around such needs and values. "Group identity relates to a more primordial or pre-modern idea of community and harkens back to closed collective societies, in which individualism plays no ideological role. Today these societies must function within the modern, globalized world, preserving their subculture by holding on to more collective values; within these communities, expressions of identity may refer to authentic values of the community, tradition or religious scripts. When mediation is used within the framework of collective identity, a natural clash may ensue between the different groups to which the parties belong, and no treatment of individual-level interests will help to repair the rift that a clash like this causes. In fact, attempts to reduce these differences to interests that may be coordinated or worse, constructively manipulated, can actually lead to intensifications of identity-based conflicts" [10].

J. Burton's conflicts resolution theory suggests taking into account the basic human needs that differ from the interests and include the necessity of group security and acknowledgement of the unique identity and using them in conflict management during the conflict resolution. The main

goal for the conflict resolution has to be elimination of moral and psychological threats, tension and disappointments in basic needs and not only satisfaction of the material interests.

J. Rothman considers the collective identities as self-perceptions filled with a “cultural formula”. The cultural formula is based on the inner needs and preferences, group characteristics and collective values. In identities conflicts, it can be personal, group or intergroup one yet the identity is always the source of controversy and conflict catalyst. The parties can perceive themselves as personal “maximizers” while protecting the individualistic values; they can be groups and feel as a part of a collective unity; they can feel as carriers of multiple cultural identities and enter the conflicts at the intergroup level. All these perceptions are generated by the cultural formula – identity. The identity becomes an ideological basis of the conflict participants, which is filled with personal, group and intergroup emotions, values and meanings [10].

Identity-based conflicts do not always fit into the simple cognitive schemes. According to J. Rothman, one of the attributes of the identity-based conflict is its “elusiveness”. In other words, such a conflict is deeply subjective; rivals found in an identity-based conflict sometimes can hardly explain the nature of their rivalry. When the conflicting parties describe their controversial issues in terms of history, of events or significance, an outside observer may hear very different stories. The fact that one side presents as a struggle for freedom, the other presents as a terrorism [8]. The conflict resolution theory focuses its attention on the capacity of socio-political integration to transform the destructive identity-based conflicts into constructive conflicts of interests. Civic integration becomes the main method of constructive conflict resolution on the basis of meta-ethnic identification.

### **3. Results and discussion**

The growth of ethnic conflicts in Russia occurs when ethnic groups tend to perceive themselves as victims of value claims of other ethno-religious and ethno-political groups, i.e. in the situation of awareness of a threat to group security. In this aspect, an adequate identification of mechanisms of identity-based conflict initiation and the involvement of new members are the path for forecasting and early warning of conflicts.

One of the regions of Russian Federation where identity-based conflicts are wide spread is the North Caucasus. It is the region where different civilizations meet, synchronically and diachronically. Traditional socio-cultural communities that define the social landscape of the North Caucasus cannot come to a compromise about their identities and group values. The way to alter this situation is the construction and maintenance Russian civic identity based on non-ethnic affiliations thus eliminating or substantially reducing intolerance as negative stereotyped images of "others" and the rejection of otherness.

The technologies of conflict settlement, which recommend isolating the identity from the concealed controversy and the conflict situation, are an example of conflictological management capable of aggravating but not resolving the ethnic controversy. When a realistic conflict touches on resources or conscious clearly defined goals, the traditional technologies can be a useful reference point in the conflict resolution process. However, as the in-depth subjective and emotional problems get involved into the conflicts, such as maintaining the group solidarity and security, it seems impossible to separate the identity from the conflict problem because collective identities of the conflict participants are under threat; at least, this is how the identity conflict parties interpret their genesis. When resolving ethno-political conflicts, it makes no sense to apply the control methods using the structural separation of various conflict components: an attempt to separate emotions, values, identities from the essence of controversy can only aggravate the ethnic conflict and to give a destructive character to the forms of manifestation thereof.

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unique identity and using them in conflict management during the identity conflict resolution. The main goal for the identity conflict resolution has to be elimination of moral and psychological threats, tension and disappointments in basic needs and not only satisfaction of the material interests. J. Rothman considers the collective identities as self-perceptions filled with a cultural formula. The cultural formula is based on the inner needs and preferences, group characteristics and collective values. In identities conflicts, it can be personal, group or intergroup one yet the identity is always the source of controversy and conflict catalyst. The parties can perceive themselves as personal maximizers while protecting the individualistic values; they can be groups and feel as a part of a collective unity; they can feel as carriers of multiple cultural identities and enter the conflicts at the intergroup level. All these perceptions are generated by the cultural formula – identity. The identity becomes an ideological basis of the conflict participants, which is filled with personal, group and intergroup emotions, values and meanings [10].

Alongside with the pronounced social and economic factors of ethnic tension escalation, the processes of traditionalization and regionalization of the North Caucasus also do not allow overcoming the in-depth value controversies. Remaining unresolved, the regional ethnic conflicts turn into identities conflicts generating open violence. In the North Caucasus, ethno-nationalism, which initiates the conflicts of identities, gives evidence about the institutional degradation of civic culture and destabilization of the regional democratic processes. The civic responsibility is changed to ethnicity mobilization; and the religious fundamentalism becomes the most important tool of conflict activity.

Traditionalization and regionalization of the North Caucasus in the conditions of lingering identity-based conflicts do not allow ensuring a stable formation of civil identity. Regional conflicts, which began as the conflicts of interests, turn into identity-based conflicts generating violence, the likelihood of overcoming which is reducing considerably. The North Caucasian region is characterized both by realistic and non-realistic conflicts, however, with the identities conflicts dominating and overflowing into the violent ones.

Identity-based conflicts in the North Caucasus are characterized by traditional and affective types of social interactions as well as by the absence of real subject matter, which makes these conflicts emotionally loaded and difficult to resolve. In identity-based conflicts, orientation to destruction becomes the strategy of opposing parties. The realistic conflicts (conflicts of interests) develop in a less destructive manner and are easier to settle. Non-realistic conflicts (identity-based conflicts) are devoid of rationalized subjective claims. They emerge as the outcome of a in-depth value crisis and as a result of excess tension. The escalation of social frustration brings about the destruction of systemic integrity of the North Caucasian society. The tension accompanying the emergence of a conflict situation acts as the stage determining further unfolding of the conflict either in the direction of its turning into a positive conflict – realistic, rational, constructive one; or to a negative conflict – the irrational, destructive conflict of identities which in this case includes elements of confrontation, violence, compulsion and suppression. Violence in the regional conflicts is determined by the scale and intensity of social dissatisfaction, which acts as a necessary condition for turning to open violence. The acuteness of the identities conflicts is manifested in irrational and aggressive character of parties' confrontation, their orientation to struggle "to the bitter end".

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

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

The participants of identity-based conflicts cannot rationalize the situation and often experience difficulty in explaining the reasons of their personal actions. Motives for participation of individuals and groups in identity-based conflicts are very important for the assessment of the perspectives of conflict resolution; in order to satisfy their material interests people are unlikely to risk their lives. But there are many cases where participation in a conflict is more or less pronounced as a sacrifice but not an imminent risk; sometimes willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of any lofty ideals is clearly recognized or verbalized by the parties of identity-based conflicts.

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

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

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

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

1. Acknowledgement of ethnic pluralism for promoting the macro-social solidarity within the legal space.

2. Political representation of ethnic communities for granting a guarantee of the interests, identities and values of various groups being taken into account when state decisions are made and resources are allocated.

3. Redistribution of economic and political resources between various social subjects for preventing the inequalities, disproportions and fragmentation on the basis of economic status, ethnic and religious identity.

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

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

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

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

perceiving the threats to group security, the intensity of social dissatisfaction, and the scale of institutional support, which jointly are the conditions of open confrontation. In the North Caucasus, the negative ethnic stereotypes in interpreting the threats to group security and generated by value and structural controversies act as a source of deep ethno-political conflicts.

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

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

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

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

The religious factor of traditionalist renaissance in Russia became one of the most important instruments of ethnic mobilization. Constant appeals of politicians, public and social figures to

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

Identity-based conflicts are determined by the general crisis of integration strategy. But the specific feature of such conflicts in that region is that they reflect the controversy between traditionalism and modernity. Traditionalism became a serious obstacle to economic and social development and a source of many tensions and conflicts. The process of revivalism of radical ethnicity of the 1990-s in the North Caucasus is still acting as a conflict producing factor. Collective rights for a traditional way of life are supported by public opinion and intellectuals.

In the North Caucasus the radical ethno-nationalism that initiates identity-based conflicts, reveals the institutional degradation of civil culture and destabilization of regional democratic process. Civil affiliations and responsibility are replaced by mobilization of reactive traditionalism; the religious fundamentalism becomes the most important tool of the disputed activity. Remaining unresolved, regional ethno-political conflicts that have begun as the conflicts of interests, turn into conflicts of identities thus generating and perpetuating violence. The probability of their solution in future decreases substantially and such conflicts very often transform into protracted conflicts. The escalation of identity-based conflicts and their transformation into armed clashes is a serious threat to stability not only in the Caucasian region, but in Russia as a whole.

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

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

The systemic crisis caused by protracted identity-based conflicts at regional level can be overcome by deliberate designing of integrative civic identity, cultivation of such major elements of global culture, as democratization, transparency, rationalization. The formation of integrative civic identity can help to create stable relations between ethno-cultural groups in multi-ethnic



Russian regions. Social integration creates conditions for reduction of the uncontrolled, 'non-unrealistic' conflicts of identities and their transformation into soluble "realistic" conflicts of interests. Overcoming identity-based conflicts in Southern Russia depends on an active civic stand, and on not only legal status of a person, but also on his/her ability to sociocultural integration on the basis of civil cooperation and cultural dialogue. Russia is in a sharp need of a new model of socio-political integration.

Integration implies equitable social relationships, civic solidarity, and moral community, based on tolerance, tactfulness, trust and security. The systemic crisis caused by identity-based conflicts at the regional level can be overcome by purposefully constructing the integration civic identity, by cultivating such paramount elements of civic culture as democratization, pluralism, rationalized perception of "other" cultural identities. In the North Caucasian society, the strategy of conflict resolution has to be built on the principles of civic solidarity and cooperation but not on assimilation policy or suppression of ethnic distinctions.

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

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

The analysis of relation between the ethnic tension and identity at the regional level leads us to the idea of destructive effect of system controversies conditioned by social fragmentation and disintegration, dissatisfaction in the basic needs of equality, justice, and security. In the empirical study of the ethno-confessional relationships development prospects in the North Caucasus, it is pointed out that interethnic relationships in the region can be characterized as stably tense ones. Alongside with that, neither the former nor the latter are viewed as the acutest problems and rank 11 and 15, respectively, out of 16 suggested in the social problems topicality rating. This result proved to be slightly unexpected, given the character of the place occupied by the ethno-national problems range in the social and political discourse in the region. According to the respondents, the problems which are common for the entire country are the most relevant: corruption and bribery (48,5%), prices and taxes growth and inflation (46,5%), unemployment (38,6%), the rise in crime (34,9%); housing problem and the communal service problems (32,8%). Although the respondents have estimated the probability of interethnic conflicts as average, in conditions of a stable tension any conflict regardless of its true causes can quickly turn into an interethnic one. For such circumstances, perceiving the actions of people of other nationalities as a potential threat to one's

own nationality security is characteristic. The situation that has formed creates favourable conditions for ethno-conflict mobilization – quick uniting of people according to their national sign for participating in the conflict actions. The high tension in interethnic relationships is the main reason why local conflicts having an interethnic component keep to break out within the North Caucasus [1].

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

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

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

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

There are following aspects we have to be borne in mind when discussing the socio-political integration in Southern Russia and North Caucasus. First, integration is a macro-political project the content of which is largely determined by the problems of ensuring the social security and by the polyethnic configuration of the Russian society. Second, the development of post-Soviet Russia after armed ethnic conflicts termination demonstrates that it is inadmissible and impossible to orient to political isolationism and cultural exceptionality of ethnic communities [2;3;5;6;9;11].

## **Conclusion**

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

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

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

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

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