

Separatism in modern Russia: activity, classification, forecast

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Abstract

In modern Russia latent separatism is on the rise, primarily online. Simultaneously the state toughens separatism suppression policy. Weakening of the central state authority is the main factor; that may cause speedy and destructive strengthening of separatism for the Russian state. New factors emerged that grow separatism in Russia; this includes support by Russian authorities of separatists in the Ukraine.

Keywords: modern separatism in Russia; relative deprivation;
separatism types; state strategy counteracting separatism.

Introduction:

separatism in Russia as a political and scientific problem

This article is the author's response to a growing relevancy of separatism in Russia, specifically while authoritarian tendencies of Russian authorities are on the rise. Scientific forecast of separatism development in current day Russia is important. Actions of central Russian authority are in many respects defined by the perception of high separatism danger. For example, representatives of the ruling regime actively use an argument, that securing unity of Russian Federation is the

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achievement of the regime. Moreover, the president of Russia is convinced, that victory over separatists justifies the existence of this regime. One may draw this conclusion from V. Putin's interview in the documentary "President", which aired on the channel "Russia 1" (Putin 2015). Securing unity of the country is one of the top goals for the Russian authorities. For authorities representatives this goal de facto justifies human rights violations, breaking laws and factual federalism liquidation as a constitutional principle in Russia.

Separatism in Russia is not new. Relevancy of separatism for this country is defined by separatism rooted in a long-term historic tradition. Besides that, separatism is not concentrated in "national outskirts", it shows in Russia also in regions populated by ethnic Russians. Separatism in a form of creating independent and quasi-independent states during the Russian Civil War of 1918–1920 was typical for predominantly Russian-populated territories: Siberia, Far East, Kuban and others. Therefore, separatism for Russia is an inherited factor (path dependence), characteristic for a considerable territory of the country.

Growth of separatist moods and their practical manifestations are the real threat. The main threat is - Territories separating from Russia. The threat seen as especially dangerous by the central authorities, is a separation of territories that mine oil and gas, as such territories are a foundation of "carbon-fossil" economy of the entire Russia. In case of this threat coming to reality, Russia will cease existence as an important actor in international politics. The scenario prospect for Russian authorities is absolutely unacceptable. Separatism in Russian Federation is a factor for political change not only in this country but the whole Eurasian region.

High relevancy of separatism in Russia as a socially-political problem, presents a task to scientifically study and forecast separatism. In the absence of such research, it is impossible to define correctly at least a vague vector of separatism development. Simultaneously, separatism is complex to scientifically study. It is

judged deeply negative or positive, depending on the political view of the assessing party. Separatism is a struggle, hence evaluations of separatism are highly emotional, which gets in the way of objectivity.

Moreover, in conditions of an authoritarian political regime in Russia studying separatism may be dangerous for a scientist. The reason is, a productive analysis of separatism requires studying policies of authorities. First, Separatism is a reaction to such policies. Second, the state of separatism is in many respects defined by its suppression forms by authorities. Conclusions of scientific research do not always satisfy the state authority. Moreover, such authority has numerous means to “influence” the researcher.

With this article, the author continues traditional for himself research focus. Specifically, studying modern separatism. The article pursues following goals:

1. To describe the system of methods used by the author to study modern separatism in Russia.
2. To assess the prevalence of separatism idea in public opinion in Russia.
3. To highlight separatism factors, including the new ones.
4. To expand separatism types classification, characteristic for Russia.
5. To characterize Russian authority strategy to suppress separatism.
6. To forecast separatism development in Russia.

These article subparts are highlighted corresponding to the latter goals.

System of study methods of modern separatism in Russia

Each region, susceptible to separatism is unique. Factors, manifestations forms, social and political consequences-are all different. Therefore, scientific methods used for research are unique as well. To study modern separatism in Russia the author used interrelated methods:

1. Studying current legislation and its changes in Russian Federation.

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2. Qualitative analysis of the Russian Internet segment, including the separatists websites.
3. Analysis of historic sources, characterizing separatism in Russian Empire.
4. Non-included Separatism observation. The author due to his federal government and municipal tenure during the period of 1991–2000, observed various manifestations of separatism in different regions of Russia.
5. Secondary analysis of previously conducted research on various aspects of separatism in Russia.
6. Individual expert interviews with opinion leaders in republics of northern Caucasus during 2001–2014, and analysis of such interviews.
7. Focus groups, conducted in 2011 by the author and his colleagues under auspices of an NGO “Southern regional resource Center” in republics and regions of northern Caucasus within a program called “Promotion and protection of NGO interests in northern Caucasus”.

Separatism in public opinion in Russia

Separatism basis is a relative deprivation of large social groups and desire of regional elites to manage resources independently. Therefore, it is possible to assess the level of separatism through an evaluation of public opinion. Latter criteria can be used only indirectly to study the growth of a separatism problem because in Russia one practically does not conduct empiric studies of secession moods. One may only theorize that the reason for a low amount of such studies is the fear of researchers while interpreting the data. “Wrong political interpretation” may lead to criminal persecution.

Hence, the weakness of the empiric basis defines superficiality of separatism scientific analysis by Russian authors. A rare exception is a survey by Levada - Center, conducted on 15–18 November 2014. The stated question was: “how do

you feel about the region, where you live, seceding from Russia?”. The responses were: “completely positive” 1%, “likely positive” 7%. Secession is clearly and dominantly perceived as negative. To the same question people also responded: “likely negative” 26% and “definitely negative” 61% (Russians on separatism 2013). Based on the results of this study one may draw a conclusion that separatism has a weak base in Russia. Nevertheless, all-Russian studies of separatism are not productive, because they do not characterize it in the regional aspect. This very aspect is decisively more relevant. Obviously, that 8% of separatism sympathizers all over Russia may become a majority in a specific region.

Russian Federation is not a Federation that resulted from voluntary states unification. The federative arrangement of Russia is a result-during the Soviet period to solve the problem of ethnic and economic heterogeneity of the country. Practically Russian Federation is an heir of an empire; created as a result of annexing new territories, including by conquest. Due to this, the population of the country does not have the notion of a federative organization, the population does not perceive the federation as a substantial value. Secession under such conditions is viewed as an acceptable way to solve development problems. In other words, a secession of territories away from Russia, may be perceived by the population of these territories as acceptable and possible. In the consciousness of the elite social groups, secession is justified to satisfy one out of three goals (or a combination of such goals): economic growth, preservation of original culture or democratic development within the seceded territory.

Evaluation of separatism levels in modern Russia is difficult due to empiric base weakness. The main characterizing criteria is an approval of a secession idea by the public opinion. The author considers; that to adequately forecast separatist moods, one requires specialized and comprehensive research of relative deprivation bases in the regions of Russia, with proper results mapping. Such research is only

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feasible using methods of secondary analysis of studies already conducted because Russian authorities have no interest in revealing bases and levels of relative deprivation-the main factor of protests. Such materials if they become public, first discredit the authorities, second become a “roadmap” for opposition movements. Respectively, Russian authorities will not allow such research.

Separatism factors in Russia

The main factor, which traditionally makes separatists moods come to strengthen in Russia, is weakening of the state Center. This center in own development represented as Imperial, Soviet or federal. The author made the conclusion regarding weakening of the state Center as a sufficient base strengthening separatism fifteen years ago (Savva 2001). Latest scientific work confirmed the author’s conclusion. So according to A. A. Akhmetov, separatism relevancy goes up during the authorities legitimacy crisis (Akhmetov 2013). In the case of the central authorities crisis, which is highly possible in conditions of the authoritarian-personal regime, separatism advocates may obtain a real possibility to realize secession plans. Such crisis may be caused, as one of the possibilities, by a random and unexpected reason (for example, death or sickness of the Russian president).

An important separatism factor is the force of the civil society. In Russia, civil society is weak. This causes additional opportunities for spreading separatist moods because civil society structures are an effective mechanism of risks checks. Approval of isolated social groups secessionist moods by civil society is unlikely because in case of a struggle for a session, emerging risks for society are abnormally high.

Separatism foundations in Russia are extremely stable during the whole history of the country, starting from the Russian Empire period. The base of this foundation is the perception by the substantial population part regarding the state

authority and administration as unjust and ineffective accordingly. The author draws this conclusion from focus groups and individual expert interviews conducted in North Caucasus republics. Perception of the state administration low efficacy forms an specific opinion. According to this opinion, central authorities ignore local interests and economically exploit the regions. Such opinion, as the author considers, is the primary mass of the relative deprivation within regions populated by ethnic Russians, as well as other ethnicities within all various territories of Russian Federation. The vivid illustration of such moods, is a dialogue during a focus group, conducted on November 9, 2011, in the city of Grozny, administrative center of Chechen Republic:

“- In our locality (in Chechen Republic-author’s note) the payment for natural gas and gasoline should be symbolic (very low-cost - authors note). We pump more oil than Saudi Arabia. However, gasoline. We are an oil-producing Republic!

- Do you know that your gasoline is imported? We are not using our own gasoline. We are an oil producing a public, but here gasoline is generally more expensive than other regions of Russia”.

At the territories populated primarily with non-Russian population, and the notion of low efficacy of the central authorities creates a belief of a conscious suppression of ethnic singularity of these non-Russian groups.

In the context of this article the author deems important a conclusion by L. Shevtsova regarding various grounds for protests in two megacities-Moscow and St. Petersburg on one hand, and other Russian territories on the other. “Most important is the problem, clearly, of the economy crisis, the problem of food on one’s table and economic interests of the population majority. In large cities, which are the trend makers of “the political fashion” -Moscow and St. Petersburg- it is a problem of population humiliation complex, a problem of dignity, political problem. This is why people went out in the streets, over 300,000 persons, not due to economic

stimuli” (Shevtsova 2015). The author of this article agrees with the conclusion of L. Shevtsova regarding different reasons for protests in various regions of Russia. Russian Federation is a state with a very high level of economic and cultural diversity (heterogeneity) within its regions. Economic heterogeneity manifests in different levels of labor productivity; in availability or lack of modern economy sectors, and so on. A level of economic development in the region and the structure of its economy has a degree of influence on to how the population of such region percepts separatism. An aspiration to break apart from a country can be observed in relatively “wealthy”, as well as “poor” regions. The “poor” thrive to succeed, to “stop and exploitation by the parent state”, the “rich” do the same with the goal to “get rid of dependents”. It is the dynamics of regional economic development that influences the growth of separatist moods at large in the different regions, which are populated by various ethnic groups, within one country. In such case, opportunities emerge to compare and negatively assess one’s own condition (or, what is even more important the position of one’s own group). As a result, a feeling of relative deprivation emerges on the ethnic/regional basis (Gur 1970). Economic factors are not most important in the separatism system of factors. In conjunction with the latter the author leaves the economic bases of separatism outside of this article.

Social-cultural heterogeneity factors in Russia are more important to draw correct conclusions regarding activity and reasons for separatism. The author relates to the group of factors as most important such as: religious, ethnic, demographic differences. Primarily, the system of sociocultural defines the place of the region on the scale of “traditionalism” - “modernization”. Russia is the only country of the post-Soviet space, which during the years of independence increased its ethnic diversity. In all the republics of former USSR, the title nations (gave names to countries) increased their number within the overall population, in Russia and absolute contrary happened. An illustration of demographic factor heterogeneity are the

following numbers: in the republics of northern Caucasus, such as Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, the number of youth of not work capable age is around 25%, in regions of central Russia this number does not exceed 12%.

Clearly, such a diversity of economic and social conditions defines existence for various basis regarding relative deprivation. Differences in socio-cultural conditions can vary substantially even in regions located in immediate proximity. Historic memory is subjective, at the same time is permanent. This memory influences a current ethnic-political situation but does not change much under the influence of current conflicts. During a study “Chechen crisis in the mass consciousness of North Caucasus population” conducted in 1995, i.e. during the period of ongoing military activity at the territory of Chechen Republic, respondents in 10 regions within Russian Federation received a question: “Assess, was there more good or bad in the relationships history between Kosaks and ethnic Highlanders?”. Among Chechens, at that point in the middle of the conflict, 22.9% responded that there was more good, 46%-bad, and 31% had a hard time answering this question (Savva E. 1995).

At the same time among Adiges in the Adygea Republic, located far away from the military zone, 13.3% admitted more good (positive to different degree) in relationships, 54.4% -more bad, 34.4% had hard time answering the question (Bolshov 1995). These indicators seem to be a paradox. Nevertheless, the negative historic memory of Adige people explains it. The memory of Caucasus war in XIX century, forced migration of substantial part of the population to Turkey and casualties during the period.

Therefore, sources of public dissatisfaction in different Russian regions may vary. Hence, reasons and character of possible mass protest activities will vary as well. This is respective to protest activities of Democratic opposition, as well as a separatist activity.

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A significant factor, immediately defining particulars of each separatism source is the sociocultural one. In other words, specifics of social organization, modernization level, group traditionalism level (usually ethnic communities) shape such important separatism indicators, as the level of separatist aggression, ease of transition to armed conflict, willingness to initiate repressions against people, who do not share the views of separatist leaders.

Since 2014, there is a new factor that influences separatism in Russia- it is support by Russian authorities of the separatist movement in the eastern Ukraine. This factor is new because support by Russian authorities of self-proclaimed Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and indirectly Nagorno-Karabakh region, is not perceived anymore as support of separatism by the population in Russia. During the past 20 years, the Russians developed an adjustment effect - these quasi-states are not viewed anymore as resulting from a session. The separatist war in the Eastern Ukraine is currently accompanied by and massive media campaign in the Russian mass media controlled by the authorities. In the course of this campaign, separatism is consciously not called separatism. Any analogs of Ukrainian antiterrorist activity to counterterrorism operation of Russian Federation in the Chechen Republic, are excluded from the official media.

Despite this, separatism support in the eastern Ukraine legitimizes in the Russian public opinion the right of the regional populations to part from Russia. Experts also note the growth of public opinion destructiveness, which is a result of the war in the eastern Ukraine. A. Gromov, while commenting results of the Levada - Center survey in regards to including leaders of Lugansk and Donetsk Republics into Russian political life (about 30% approve such inclusion), states: "Destabilization desire -is one of the main Ukrainian events for Russia. Dissatisfaction of a substantial population part with the setup of Russian life found an exit not in an attempt to change life- as this is perceived as something

fundamentally impossible, but rather destroy the life” (Gromov 2015).

The direct influence of events in the Eastern Ukraine onto separatism conditions in Russia manifested in attempts to conduct so-called “federalization marches” in August 2014. Federal security service of Russian Federation and police utilizing specially prepared individuals, who were not servicemen of these organizations, suppressed attempts to conduct the mass event “For Siberian Federalization” in Novosibirsk and other event “For Kuban Federalization” in Krasnodar.

Separatism types in Russia

To properly study separatism in current Russia, it must scientifically classified as D. I. Sherbinin highlights, on an example of modern Siberian separatism, there are two types- secessionist and autonomous-republican. Within the boundaries of the secessionist type, there are two orientations-Russian and anti-Russian (Sherbinin 2010). In this case, one uses single foundation to classify on one level of separatism - i.e. classifying activity of separatist moods and manifestations.

M. A. Domareva offered the most detailed and relevant classification of separatism. She divided separatism types under several foundations. According to M. A. Domareva, separatism manifestation spheres are economic, legal and ideological. As far as the number of actors separatism may be two-sided or multifaceted. It is the ideological foundation that forms ethnic, religious and regional separatism. Political objectives of the region allow to identify separatism in a form of a secession, irredentism, and political autonomy. Functioning dynamics can be differentiated into evolutionary and radical separatism. Political goals of a region are separated into tactical and strategic. The social meaning analysis identifies separatism that is archaic or progressive. Duration criteria shape into separatism that is one time or ongoing. Manifestation character defines factual and formal separatism (Domareva 2004).

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The classification outlined in the previous paragraph, in the authors opinion, is sufficient for applicable and scientific analysis. We must stipulate, that separatism types, represented by one type, may complete each other, for example, ethnic and religious separatism.

The classification mentioned above must be expanded taking modern realities into consideration of forming information society with various communication means criteria.

The author of this article studied electronic resources (websites, groups, and social media) which advocate increasing autonomy levels from the federal center in Russia in 2014.

In the 21st century, such electronic resources are proliferating very fast. These resources consolidate people, who do not have real opportunities to communicate with each other, but have similar ideas. Such electronic resources are represented by two main subtypes: websites and groups (opened and closed) in Facebook and “Vkontakte” networks.

The author believes it is important to expand separatism typology with such types as virtual (emerging online) and real (emerging in real space). A vivid tendency in current Russia is an activation of virtual separatism. We must note, that in some cases, virtual separatism is a preliminary stage for activities in real (physical) social space. However, the large part of virtual separatist activity stays online and does not result in actions.

Russian authorities strategy countering separatism: legal novelties and practices

Central Russian authorities view separatism as one of the main security threats. Novelties in the federal laws confirm this. A federal law from December 28, 2013, number 433-FZ “on introducing changes to Penal Code of Russian Federation”,

introduced a new article (280.1) into the Penal Code. This new article stipulates real jail time for public appeals to activities violating the territorial integrity of Russian Federation. The jail penalty is up to three years, and if mass media or the Internet are used up to five years jail.

Separatism relevancy in modern Russia is to be also assessed under different criteria, and not only toughening of legal legislation. Most important of such criteria is increased cruelty of law enforcement towards people and organizations, deemed as separatist suspects. Increasing fears by authorities of separatism have manifested in new drills scenarios by the state to disperse separatist public rallies. We believe that the new scenario was approved at the end of 2014-beginning of 2015. It is confirmed by the following: on May 30, 2015, in Tumen, a joint drill of Russian Federation Ministry of Internal Affairs troops and regional police took place. The drill scenario foresaw: about 2000 inhabitants of Tumen (authors note: major Siberian administrative center with the oil-based economy) advocated federalization, i.e. increasing the territory status or a secession from Russia. These people built barricades and tent town in the center of the city, The way it was done in 2013 on Maidan in Kyiv. During this drill, the barricades were torn down by armored troop carrier vehicles, and the protesters machine-gunned from high-caliber automatic rifles from these troop carriers (Kisilev 2015). Is important to note, that a year before these events, in spring of 2014, during a similar drill in Saratov machine gun fire was used only to scare the public. Still in 2014, shooting people was not foreseen by the drill scenario (website “public opinion”). Shooting from machine guns caliber 14.5 into a rally protesters cannot be selective, i.e. directed only against armed and dangerous people. Such method of stopping a public event will inevitably lead to many casualties. Therefore, the change in methods to stop public separatist events (rallies) during a short period demonstrates a growing fear of Russian authorities. It also demonstrates readiness to use excessively cruel

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methods to suppress separatism.

While preventing “Federalization marches” in Krasnodar and Novosibirsk in 2014, Federal security service of Russian Federation used, besides servicemen, also militants, who were not officially employed by the state.

Assessing specific tattoos, these people were a part of Russian nationalist organizations. The task of these militants was to use violence against “federalization marches” participants.

“Federalization marches” did not take place in neither Krasnodar nor Novosibirsk. Despite, Federal Security Bureau arrested civil activists who were organizers of the rallies that did not take place. For example, Civil activist from Krasnodar Darja Poljutova became the first Russian citizen, indicted of public advocacy to violate territorial integrity of Russian Federation under Article 280.1 of Russian penal code, Because of her attempt to organize “Kuban federalization March”. Authorities also incriminated her for public appeals to implement extremist activity under the article 280 of Russian penal code. In 2014–2015, she spent a half year in a Krasnodar investigation jail (Poljudova 2015). D. Poljudova was released from the investigation jail as a result of an active public campaign. Her criminal persecution is presently ongoing.

Russian regime chose as the main strategy to prevent separatism, so-called “spot” repressions. This type of political repressions is characterized by a small number of casualties. Currently, Russian authorities have no need for mass repressions-majority of the population supports the authority. Simultaneously, employing fabrications and egregious human rights violations the authorities initiate criminal and administrative cases against civil activists, who can become organization centers for the public in case of massive spontaneous antigovernment protests. The strategy of “spot” repressions is directed to liquidate potential consolidation centers of any civil protest, including separatism.

In northern Caucasus, to exclude a person forever from public activities, one actively employs political murders and fabrication of criminal cases with long jail times (murder of Timur Kuashev 2014; Magomaeva 2014).

To intimidate leaders of ethnic movements, and increase their loyalties one uses fabricated administrative cases with arrests up to 15 days. So, in January 2014 while driving out of Krasnodar Asker Soht was arrested. He is the chairman of Adige ethnic society in Krasnodar region “Adige Hasa”. One accused him of not following a traffic policeman’s demand, and he got 15 days of arrest. Officially servicemen of Federal Security Service had nothing to do with the arrest. However, specifically they were the ones who clarified to colleagues of A. Soht in “Adige Hasa” organization, that his arrest was a prophylactic measure. Federal security service representatives prohibited A. Soht and his colleagues to tell anybody about this case. Possibly, because of such inhibitions the public is not aware of all intimidation cases against ethnic organizational leaders and persons, advocating separatism ideas.

Separatism development forecast for Russia

The author stated above that separatism manifestation activity in Russia is traditionally defined by such a main factor, as the power of the central authorities. During the separatism history, it was Imperial, Soviet or federal authorities. It did not fundamentally change the relationships of federal center and the regions. It is important to highlight, that a relatively high level of separatist moods is present in the mass consciousness in Russian regions. Will these moods result in actions? In author’s opinion, the answer to this question defined previously in history and is currently defined only by the efficacy of central authority to suppress separatism.

Prerequisites for separatism manifestations in Russia are stably present during a long time. Currently, a repressive policy of Russian authorities towards the opposition and any dissidents - increases the level of confrontation between authorities

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and Russian civil society.

The part of civil society includes, among others, civil leaders and organizations, that have a goal of succeeding certain territories from Russia. Destabilization of the political situation in Russia, for example, massive and violent confrontation of authorities and the society or a state coup will inevitably cause rapid and powerful activation of separatists. Unfortunately, possible consequences of such activation are not sufficiently researched. At the same time, the possibility of such destabilization, as increased political repercussions in Russia are assessed by experts as high. So, E. Pain states: “A social-economic crisis is emerging in Russia due to internal reasons, as well as a result of increasing international isolation of Russia. This already causes new political rivalries in the country, and these rivalries will only increase. In such conditions, it is more likely that the authorities will increase pressure on self-organizing ideological groups...” (Pain 2015)

Challenges, which Russian leaders present to the world, including the conscious formation the of the separatist movement in the eastern Ukraine and supporting this movement militarily, are highly dangerous. They destroy the bases of international stability in the period after the completion of the “Cold War”. Potentially not less dangerous for international society is the increased growth of separatism in Russia and a spontaneous, uncontrolled disintegration of the country.

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