

Mikhail A. Alexseev, ed. *Center-periphery conflict in post-Soviet Russia: a Federation Imperiled*. New York: St. Martin's, 1999.

This book, the first of this kind, is an effort to understand why, contrary to the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has survived the secession crises and has, in spite of them, held together. It is an interdisciplinary study of Russian regions and their political life and willing. It contains case studies of those regions that have experienced regional separatism crises, at different levels, and may be considered as the next centers for such crises.

The first chapter of the book, written by Stephan Hanson, is a theoretical comparison of the secession crises in the Soviet and Russian societies. He divides these separatism tendencies into two categories; the "essentialist" ones that are based on cultural and ethnical identities, and the "instrumentalist" ones that are based on economic interests. For him, the Soviet Union crises belonged to the first category, but those of Russia are mostly the instrumentalist ones. To explain the collapse of the Soviet Union under these crises and the non-collapse of the Russian Federation in spite of the similar crises, he bases his arguments on two elements. First is the role "Marxist-Leninist" ideology played in holding together all the anti-Soviet secessionist leaders, including Russians themselves, during the Soviet period, contrary to the new era when anti-Russian ethnic leaders can hardly find a common political purpose. This is still harder as Moscow applies a non-homogenous policy toward these regions. The second element is the position of the Western countries on these crises. If in the Soviet period, the West was supportive of the separatist movements, in the second period, it considers these as the internal affairs of Russia and has been favorable to the territorial integrity of this country. Hanson emphasizes that although with these two elements these separatist movements cannot present a serious threat to Russian integrity, the regional strategies can change in the future and change the perspective of the Russian Federation.

The second chapter, the first case study, is a brilliant analysis of the Chechnya wars (1994 and 1996), written by Gail Lapidus. She explains why war replaced the political disputes in Chechnya, and after mentioning different internal historical and political elements, she also considers the passive role of the Western countries as a significant element in the development of the war. The next chapter considers Chechnya's neighboring region, Dagestan, and the logical question about the war in Chechnya developing in this region. The article argues that though this region has many elements favoring war, there is an essential element that distinguishes it radically from Chechnya. This is the political culture and system of "ethnic balancing" in Dagestan that since the Soviet period has been functioning, with success, in this region. For the author, Mikhail A. Alexseev, this system that is the result of the lack of a major ethnic group, has led this region into a tradition of negotiation and compromise. However, the next article argues that in spite of this element and the fact that Dagestan solved peacefully its conflicts in 1992 and 1993, it remains a place to watch. This is because of its economic situation, being heavily dependent on subsidies from Moscow, and also because of the development of radical Islamic and pro-Chechen activists in this region, especially in its western areas.

The other chapters concern the less known cases: Sakha-Yakutia, Tyva and Buryatia (in Siberia), Pskov (in western Russia) and Primorskiy Kray (in the Russian Far East). These are the regions where there have been some expressions of independence or interethnic violence. These analyses show that political separatism in many cases is used by the local elites in their rivalries with Moscow. They use it as a tool to get more power over economic resources and to establish direct ties with international economic institutions and business actors.

The conclusion of the book offers a fragile image of the Russian Federation and finishes with the major question asking if these center-periphery disputes will deepen the social and economic crisis in Russia or if this differentiation will favor the development of the different regions within the framework of this federation.

This book opens the discussion on an important issue, the nature of relations between Moscow and its periphery, that is going to take a central place in the political life of the Russian Federation, and is going to become a key issue in understanding the future of the federation. It holds interesting information for those who work on the internal politics of Russia, as well as for those who are engaged in conflict prevention in this part of the world.

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