

**Institutional Tools of Conflict Management - Asymmetrical  
Federalism in Ethnic-Territorial Conflicts: Quantitative Analysis of  
Russian Regions**

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## **Abstract**

The following paper analyses the role of federal institutions in ethnic-territorial conflict management. For many years, there have been arguments favouring federalism as the best possible form of government for a nation of disparate ethnicities and regions. The general idea is that a centralised federal government that protects both national and regional interests is the most responsive form of administration for a state marked by ethnic and territorial diversity. This paper explores the interconnection between conflict, democratisation and the role of federal institutions in conflict mitigation.

## **I. Introduction**

Are federal institutions capable of operating in states where complex territorial issues and ethnic diversity simultaneously exist? Currently, this is one of the most important challenges to federalism. The analysis of this is even more complicated if we consider a "democratising" state – one in a process of transition from an authoritarian or totalitarian regime to democracy. Democratisation, in the context of ethnic conflicts in a federal state, is an important analytical tool. The relationship between conflict and democratisation resembles the 'chicken-egg' dilemma. Democracy is about both conflict and consensus. More accurately, democracy represents the process that transforms the former into the latter.

Democratisation is accompanied by numerous conflicts, among which centre-peripheral conflict is just one form<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the process of regime transition intensifies the centre-peripheral tensions that had existed during the preceding (non-democratic) regime. In a multi-ethnic state, federal arrangement is one of the possible institutional tools in conflict management. Therefore, we gauge the level of intensity of centre-peripheral conflicts by establishing the range of the autonomy granted to a region which was involved in conflict during the process of democratisation.

It is taken as a given that contextual conditions in the regions, as constituent units of a state, determine the scope of regional requirements for additional autonomy from the central government (or the degree of intensity of the dispute). Thus, the contextual factors determine the asymmetry in the formation of a new federal arrangement.

In other words, the demands of regions might depend on geopolitical factors (size, external border, population), on ethnic considerations (the size of an ethnic minority group living in a region), and the level of economic development in a region. Accordingly, our assumptions are:

- (1) the larger the territory of a region and the higher it's population, the more likely a request for increased autonomy from central government; regions bordering foreign states

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the notion of centre-peripheral "conflicts" is used interchangeably with "disputes".

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are more inclined to feel more remote from the administrative centre and might request a higher level of autonomy.

(2) the regions containing a high percentage of titular ethnic groups are more likely to demand more autonomy from the central government.

(3) and finally, the regions which are more economically developed, may attempt to gain more freedom in their "domestic" policy.

In the theoretical section, this paper analyses the philosophical interconnection between federalism and democracy. During the period of regime change (*i.e.*, regime transition) the federal institutions are important as long as they are viewed in a "dynamic" or in a "procedural" perspective. Thus, these institutions help in accommodating the various demands of ethnical territories and they also prevent or manage conflict. Therefore, it is crucial to take account of the issue of the asymmetry of federalism. Asymmetry, as a result of "federal bargaining" and the flexibility of the institutions, is unavoidable; especially in a process of regime change accompanied by miscalculation of multi-level reforms and mistakes. A federal system is also supposed to limit the ability of the ethnic majority of a region to impose its will on the ethnic minorities.

The counter-argument states that federalism can be analysed as a Janus-faced arrangement. Federalism can perpetuate and intensify the very conflict it is designed to manage. According to this line of argument, the conflicts become institutionalised in the very frame of the federal system. Thus, federalism empowers regional elites to sustain and exacerbate conflict.

Following on from this in the second section, the theoretical assumption of the role of federal institutions in the centre-peripheral conflict mitigation is tested by empirical observation. The regions which were involved in centre-peripheral conflicts during the transition of the regime are so-called "ethnically-defined" regions with the status of "republics". The centre-peripheral relations of regions holding a different status (krais, oblast, autonomous krais, cities of federal significance,

Obydenkova, Anastassia, "Institutional Tools of Conflict Management - Asymmetrical Federalism in Ethnic-Territorial Conflicts: Quantitative Analysis of Russian Regions", *Peace, Conflict and Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 7, July 2005, available from <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>. etc.) were not prone to conflict. Therefore, in the empirical part I run quantitative analysis incorporating the issue of ethnicity as one of the independent variables. The examination will focus, firstly on the analysis of transition, then on the institutional arrangement (asymmetrical federalism) as an outcome of the transition process, and the concessions the centre has made for the regions. Next, the paper outlines a set of contextual factors (geopolitical factors, ethnicity, and wealth) across all of the 89 regions of the RF. The analysis approaches establishment of asymmetrical federal arrangements as an institutional tool of centre-peripheral conflict management.

## II. Federalism: Theoretical Analysis

For many years, there have been arguments that federalism provides the best possible form of government for a nation of ethnic and regional disparity. The general idea is that a centralised federal government that protects both national and regional interests is the most responsive administrative form for a state marked by ethnic and territorial diversity.

Political theories of federalism tend to focus on structures, actors, federal procedures, and processes. One of the most interesting classifications found within these studies was offered by Anthony Birch (1966:15). He distinguishes four approaches to this problem presented in the scientific literature:

1. The institutional or constitutional approach (K. C. Wheare<sup>2</sup>);
2. The sociological approach (W. S. Livingston<sup>3</sup>);
3. The process or developmental approach (Carl Friedrich<sup>4</sup> and Karl Deutsch<sup>5</sup>);
4. The political approach (William Riker<sup>6</sup>).

One of the possible problems with these classifications is the criteria themselves. It is not quite clear on what basis the division between the third and fourth group is made. The concepts of both of

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<sup>2</sup> Wheare, K. C., *Federal Government*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> Livingston, William, S., *Federalism and Constitutional Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956)

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich, Carl J., *Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1968) p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Deutsch M., *The resolution of conflict: Constructive and Destructive processes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Riker, William, *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1964) pp.114-115

Obydenkova, Anastassia, "Institutional Tools of Conflict Management - Asymmetrical Federalism in Ethnic-Territorial Conflicts: Quantitative Analysis of Russian Regions", *Peace, Conflict and Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 7, July 2005, available from <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>. these approaches emphasise the "procedural" or "dynamic" aspects of federalism and describe it in terms of bargaining.

Thus, in this paper, I will follow the critical analysis of the concept of federalism according to a slightly different classification, which includes three approaches to this political phenomenon:

1. The "static" or "formal" approach (also called "constitutional" approach);
2. The sociological approach;
3. The "dynamic" (or "procedural" or "functional") approach.

Undertaking the examination group by group will prevent unsystemised descriptions which would be inevitable if the objective was the analysis of the "history of federalism" – in other words an investigation according to the chronological order of the concepts. It is also more useful and challenging, from an analytical point of view, because it allows a broader review of the existing theories and concepts as classified according to these three approaches. A further remark should be made at the beginning of this analysis. I have to specify that the division of "static" and "dynamic" approaches is very much conditional as almost every concept involves both views of federalism – federalism both as a process ("bargain") and as "form" (as fixed by the constitution). Nonetheless, this division has proved to be a useful analytical tool in order to indicate the main emphasis of the concepts and to demonstrate how our understanding of the trajectory of federalism has developed.

### *1. The Formal (or Constitutional) Approach*

This approach encompasses quite a number of works on this issue. Among others, some prominent scholars of federalism such as Elazar, K. C. Wheare and William Maddox can be distinguished. For example, Elazar<sup>7</sup> described federalism as a mode of political organisation which unites separate polities within an overarching political system so as to allow each polity to maintain its political integrity. Elazar drew out a few important characteristics and principles of federal systems:

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<sup>7</sup> Elazar Danial J., *Exploring Federalism*. (The University of Alabama Press, 1987); Wheare K. C. (4<sup>th</sup> ed), *Federal Government*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

1. A written constitution should outline the terms by which power is divided, it should outline the general government, and the polities constituting the federal government;
2. Non-centralisation is understood as the diffusion of power, and decentralisation as the diffusion of specific powers to subordinate local governments (made by unilateral decisions);
3. Areal (regional) division of power – internal division of authority and power on an areal basis;
4. Maintaining union – direct lines of communication between the public and both the general and the constituent governments; the people should be able to elect representatives to all the governments which serve them;
5. Maintaining non-centralisation – constitutional polities must be equal in population and wealth (or be balanced in their inequalities); there should be a permanence of boundaries of the constituent units (CUs); and there should be substantial influence of CUs over the (in)formal amending (modification) process;
6. Maintaining the federal principle: both CUs and the nation have sets of institutions with (a) rights to change them unilaterally; (b) separate legislative and administrative institutions which are both necessary; (c) the contractual sharing of public responsibilities by all governments in the system; (d) intergovernmental collaboration or informal agreements; and (e) different “balances” which are to be developed between central government and CUs.

Elazar’s approach is often characterised as “structural”, “static”, or “constitutional”. However, the last three features of federalism that he mentions are more about “process” or “dynamics of federation”.

## *2. The Sociological Approach*

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This approach is presented mainly in the work by W. S. Livingston, who provided an alternative to the purely institutional approach. He explains federalism as congruence between a set of federal institutions and a pattern of societal diversity.<sup>8</sup> Livingston argues that the essential characteristics of federalism are not about the division of power within politics or about the resulting institutional framework, but instead that they are linked to society itself. He believes that certain societies are intrinsically federal because they are pluralist; and that federalism is simply the practical translation of the relations between the economic, social, political, and cultural forces that exist in these societies.

What is particular about this approach is that Livingston was one of the first scholars who brought up the issue of the role of federalism as a means of conflict mitigation. He underlined that the success of conflict mitigation depends on how the congruence (streamlining) of governmental structure and underlying consensus is achieved. The crucial factors in lessening the tension between the federal units and central government are social cleavages of an ethnic nature.

Livingston is open to criticism on his social vision of federalism. Federalism, as such, is not about society but about institutions. Every time we speak about the issue of fragmented social groups which are integrated in a state, we can approach the matter from the point of view of pluralism or consociationalism (plural society with overlapping ethnic/cultural/linguistic groups).

### *3. The Procedural (or Functional) Approach*

This method views federalism as "an exercise in the making of bargains". The best representative of this approach is William Riker. Riker defines federalism as a political organisation in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government, in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions. Unlike the scholars of the previous methodologies, Riker stipulates only two necessary

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<sup>8</sup> Livingston, William S., *Federalism and Constitutional Change*. (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1956) pp. 81-95

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conditions for federalism: (1) desire of the politicians of central government to expand their territorial control by peaceful means, and (2) the willingness of territories to accept the agreement to give up independence for the sake of unity.<sup>9</sup> Riker emphasises the role of the party system as a criteria for "measuring" federalism. The structure of parties corresponds with the structure of federalism. If parties are fully centralised, so is federalism (e.g., USSR, Yugoslavia, Mexico). When parties are decentralised, then federalism is only "partially centralised".

This approach focuses on the dynamic of the division of power between two levels of government. Riker pays special attention to this dynamic in relation to the two levels of government. He states that the guarantee that the constitutional act grants the two levels of government, in terms of their respective areas of autonomy, remains subject to the pull of political forces.<sup>10</sup> The bargain (accord) depends on each side receiving more benefits, as a member of the federation, than it would have outside the federal structure. These benefits include economic and military resources, in return for a diminished level of autonomy.

Riker accepts the Aristotelian distinction between "essence" and "accident". The "essence" of federalism is: (1) the political bargain that creates it, and (2) the distribution of power in political parties (which shapes the federal structure). Everything else about federalism is "accident": (1) the demarcation of areas of competence between central and constituent governments, (2) the operation of intergovernmental relations, and (3) the division of financial resources.

#### *4. Conceptualisation: ethnic-territorial conflict and federalism*

***Ethnic-Territorial Conflict*** I employ the term "conflict" in the broadest sense of its meaning, in line with the description provided in the Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science<sup>11</sup>. Conflict is any form of disagreement concerning an end to be pursued. It encompasses disputes over issues and

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<sup>9</sup> Riker, William, *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1964) pp. 114-115

<sup>10</sup> Riker, William, *ibid*, pp.114-115

<sup>11</sup> Bealey, Frank, *Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999

Obydenkova, Anastassia, "Institutional Tools of Conflict Management - Asymmetrical Federalism in Ethnic-Territorial Conflicts: Quantitative Analysis of Russian Regions", *Peace, Conflict and Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 7, July 2005, available from <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>. interests which may or may not escalate into violence. Following this approach, the terms "conflict" and "dispute" become synonymous.

The terms "conflict resolution", "conflict management", and "conflict settlement" are not equally applied in most of the conflict resolution literature. However, some scholars do use these terms interchangeably. I adopt the approach of Ho-Won Jeong in using "conflict resolution", "conflict management", and "dispute settlement" interchangeably. I accept Jeong's definition of "conflict resolution" as "a process of dealing with conflict" dealing "with root causes which implies some institutional changes"<sup>12</sup>.

The categories of "ethnicity" and of "ethnic conflict" are highly ambiguous. The notion of an "ethnic group" is used here to signify a group of people sharing a distinctive and enduring collective identity. This trait is based on common cultural traits such as language, religion, race, and perception of common heritage; it is linked to the specific territory, and the notion of shared experiences, and often to a concept of common destiny.

"Ethnic conflict" is a problematical category. This term causes confusion regarding the categorisation of disputes and actors in the conflict because it suggests that the conflict itself derives from ethnicity, instead of from the actual issues in question. So as to avoid this misleading implication, and in keeping with the other scholars, I will use the term "ethnic-territorial conflict" interchangeably with "regional conflict". "Ethnic-territorial conflict" includes the issue of ethnicity, but it also allows for a wider range of factors to be taken into account (among which ethnicity might not be a central concern). This term is mainly used to describe a complicated relationship between a region (a constituent unit) and a federal government. Such conflicts are sometimes described as central-peripheral, but it is the notion of "ethnic-territorial conflict" that allows for the emphasis of the issue of ethnicity in disputes and the multi-ethnic nature of the whole RF. For example, in using this methodology, one is able to take account of not only disputes initiated by ethnic minorities (*e.g.*, Tatars or Yakuts), but also those of the 'majority' ethnic group which happens to be a

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<sup>12</sup> Jeong Ho-Won, "Conflict Management and Resolution" in *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, Conflict*. (Academic Press, 1999), pp 389-401

Obydenkova, Anastassia, "Institutional Tools of Conflict Management - Asymmetrical Federalism in Ethnic-Territorial Conflicts: Quantitative Analysis of Russian Regions", *Peace, Conflict and Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 7, July 2005, available from <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>. minority within a particular region, but still fights for more independence for this region (this is, for example, the case of Tatarstan, where Russians who live in this republic voted for its independence along with Tatars). This example cannot be described as an "ethnic" conflict, although the issue of ethnicity was important.<sup>13</sup> This is why the use of the terms "regional conflict" or "ethnic-territorial conflict" seems logical, taking into consideration that the main focus of the analysis is on the intergovernmental relationship (the relations between the central government and the governments of the CUs). As is specified in the Constitution of the RF, all CUs are divided into two main groups – ethnically defined regions (which include 21 national republics, 10 autonomous okrugs, and 1 autonomous oblast) and territorially defined regions (6 krais, 49 oblasts, 2 federal cities – Moscow and St. Petersburg with the status of an oblast). This provides another reason for legitimate usage of both the term "ethnic-territorial" and "regional" conflicts.

**Federalism** I define "federalism" as, firstly, a set of institutions – the division of public authority between two or more constitutionally defined orders of government. Secondly, it covers a set of ideas which underpin such institutions. "Federalism" encompasses the notion of the "federal principle" which is described by Elazar as "a balance between shared-rule and self-rule" (Elazar 1987:12). Thus, federalism incorporates both constitutional (static) and procedural (dynamic) aspects.

Consequently, I will use the term "federation" in a broad sense as a political system in which a territorial division of authority between a general government and several regional governments is constitutionally established. A federal structure is designed to ensure that the constituent units, within a given state, retain at least some measure of independence in the drawing up of public policy. Although the key feature of a federation is the jurisdictional autonomy of the different

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<sup>13</sup> It would be inaccurate to describe the situation we have in the case of Tatarstan as an ethnic conflict; it is not a conflict between two ethnic groups (Russians and Tatars), but rather between the center and a region. However, even in this case, the issue of ethnicity cannot be eliminated from study (it was one of the key arguments of the Tatars elite in negotiation with the central government).

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***Asymmetrical Federalism*** The aspect which matters in defining the role of federalism in conflict mitigation is the level of asymmetry among the CUs. One of the advantages of distinguishing between the two facets of federalism – structural and functional – is that it allows us to bring up an enormously important part of the theory of federalism, the issue of asymmetry. "Asymmetry" is inseparable from all modern theories of federalism. To begin with, there is not one single federation in the world that is considered absolutely symmetrical, in terms of the rights and status of its CUs. The factors that usually foster asymmetrical federalism are: significant disparity in terms of the size of the regions; the density of the population; the presence or absence of ethnic minorities; and the socio-economic structures. All of the federal states are more or less asymmetrical, with a prevalence of different types of asymmetry (ethnic mosaic, social infrastructure, wealth, historic legacies, etc). Consequently, the only way to arbitrate in the conflict (and to accommodate diverse CUs within one state) is to give them different rights at different points in time through bilateral centre-peripheral treaties and power-sharing agreements (procedural viewpoint) and to establish a distinct status for them in the Constitution (static viewpoint). This demonstrates how federalism, both in its static and procedural aspects, can be helpful in conflict management.

Some federations have found that the only way to accommodate diversity between the regions is to incorporate asymmetry into the constitutional distribution of powers. In some cases, asymmetry has proved to be useful as a transitional arrangement in accommodating regions at different stages of political development. The RF is one of the examples of this vision of asymmetrical federalism. The asymmetrical approach to the administrative division of Russia was officially established during the Yeltsin government. The move in this direction was seen as the only way to establish stability in the RF, and to manage the growing tension between the CUs and Moscow.

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#### **IV. Empirical Analysis: Quantitative Study of 89 regions of the Russian Federation**

What is the role of federalism in ethnic-territorial conflict management? To answer this question with regard to the RF I analyse: (1) regime transition in Russia – the establishment of federal asymmetry; (2) the contextual variables of Russian regions and federal asymmetry in identifying dependent and independent variables; and, finally, (3) run quantitative analysis to establish possible causation of extreme federal asymmetry in the Russian Federation.

##### *1. Regime Transition in Russia: Establishment of Federal Asymmetry*

Transition, understood as a period of change and of major reforms of the state, presents an opportunity for regions, as potential constituent units, to bargain and to demand increased scope, power, and autonomy, and sometimes even complete independence. As an outcome of the Russian republican elections in March 1990, Yeltsin became a deputy in the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) Congress of People's Deputies and he became a Chairman in May 1990. This marked the beginning of newly constructed, highly asymmetrical Russian federalism. On 12 June 1990 RSFSR declared its own sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> The RSFSR was the seventh of fifteen union republics (SSRs) to declare sovereignty. All fifteen SSRs became separate independent states (these are the RSFSR, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Belorussia, Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, etc.). The next tier in the Soviet federal hierarchy was made up of the autonomous republics (ASSRs) within Russia. It is notable that not a single ASSR adopted the strategy followed by all of the SSRs in seeking sovereignty.

The explanation of the different expectations and strategies between the SSRs and ASSRs rested on a number of facts: (1) the SSRs were better placed (had more favourable geographical positions)

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<sup>14</sup> The flood of bilateral treaties, agreements between union republics, autonomous republics, and the RSFSR weakened the centre's exclusive jurisdiction. Among these was the decree "On protection of the Economic Foundation of the Sovereignty of the RSFSR" which asserted sole control over all foreign economic activity, natural and industrial resources, and procedures for privatization. The law "On the Operation of Acts of Organs of the USSR on the Territory of the RSFSR" which granted the Republics supremacy over Union authority, and the law "On Guaranteeing the Economic Basis of Sovereignty of the RSFSR" were expanded within the decree of August "500 Days Plan". (last part of footnote is unclear)

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to declare sovereignty and, later, independence; (2) the SSRs were incorporated into the USSR by treaty, and a claim to equal status was, therefore, more easily defended. In contrast, ASSRs were established by unilateral administrative decisions, and the directives of the RSFSR had supremacy over the limited autonomy of the ASSRs; (3) union republics (SSRs) had a longer history of independence. The ASSRs were unsure as to what to do and looked to Russia. Most supreme soviets chose to wait and monitor proceedings as declarations in the union republics began in November 1988; and (4) another explanation that might be used here is one of ethnic composition. The majority of autonomous republics in the RF are artificial constructs. In twelve out of twenty ASSRs, Russians outnumbered the titular nationality. This fact serves to explain the reason why these units did not follow the path of the SSRs and remained within one single state.<sup>15</sup>

The next step was regional elections which provided the regional elites with the opportunity to form their own electoral campaigns. Within seven months of the elections, two-thirds of the republics declared their sovereignty.

During this entire process, the general trend was that the richer republics made stronger claims for resources and autonomy in controlling their own budgets and the poorer republics attempted to protect federal subsidies. However, the most important demands that were present in all the declarations remained consistent: sovereignty to replace subordination; the supremacy of local over federal laws; autonomy in controlling economic decision-making and natural resources; and respect for local languages and customs.

The Federation Treaty was signed on 31 March 1992 and became part of the RSFSR Constitution. This agreement included three separate treaties and two protocols: one treaty for national-state formation (i.e. ethnic republics), one for administrative-territorial formations (the six krais, forty-nine oblasts and the two cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg – termed “cities of federal significance”) and one for national-territorial formations (the Jewish Autonomous oblast and ten autonomous okrugs). These treaties formalised the three-rank hierarchy of subjects of the federation

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<sup>15</sup> Census data reprinted in *Argumenti I fakti*, March 1991, cited in Kahn, Jeffrey, *Federalism, Democratization, and the rule of law in Russia*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 105.

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Bashkortostan was the only republic to receive a special appendix to the Federation Treaty, but not the only republic that achieved a special agreement with the centre before the agreement was signed. In the beginning of 1992, the President of Sakha (Yakutia), Mikhail Nikolaev, called for a higher level of independence from Moscow and for the establishment of business relations through international treaties. But on 23 March 1992, he signed an accord with the central government granting it exclusive republican control over 32% of diamond profits and 20% of all gem-diamonds, plus a significant percentage of gold and hard currency receipts. This deal was signed shortly before the Federal Treaty. Amazingly, four days after the signing the treaty, Sakha accepted a new constitution which established exclusive control over all natural resources which, thus, contradicted the terms of the agreement.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the Federation Treaty was signed and was followed by the acceptance of the RF Constitution which incorporated all of these asymmetries and contradictions.

If we review the theoretical approach to the phenomenon of asymmetrical federalism, we can state that the RF exemplifies a highly asymmetrical federal arrangement. The question that politicians and scientists are now trying to answer is, whether this high asymmetry will be followed by state consolidation or by an increase in the number and intensity of ethnic-territorial conflicts.

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<sup>16</sup> *Konstitutsiia (Osnovnoi zakon) respubliki Sakha (Iakutia)* (Yakutsk: 1995). Kahn, *ibid*, p. 130

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To conclude, perfect symmetry is impossible. Institutional or constitutional asymmetry implies the existence of special channels between the federal government and the CU. Through these channels, the CU is favoured with special privileges in contrast to other CUs. For example, Russia's federal structure is based on a system of privileges for select "titular" ethnic groups and exhibits institutional-constitutional asymmetry. The system is sometimes called *aconstitutional* because bilateral relations at governmental levels are not constitutionally justified.

## 2. *Contextual analysis and Federal Design: Independent and Dependent Variables*

The set of contextual variables that have influenced the intensity of the conflicts within the RF are, firstly, a geopolitical factor; secondly, ethnic influences; and, finally, the economic situation. The geopolitical factor implies the geographical position of the CU within the federation: the size, the population, and the existence or absence of external borders. The geopolitical factor should be analysed in close connection with ethnic-demographic issues (it is especially important to account for the size of ethnic groups within the CU). Unlike the two other variables, the geopolitical factor causes the least confusion as it is probably the only factor that can be described as being stable, throughout Soviet and post-Soviet history. However, the ethnic divisions are often considered as one of the most crucial matters in the initiation of conflicts.

One of the assumptions is that if an ethnic group forms a majority, or at least the dominant element, in a geographically-defined area, then the probability of conflict is high. In other words, the higher the percentage of an ethnic group within one constituent unit (CU), the higher the probability of conflict or the higher the intensity of the conflict between the CU and the centre. The basic role of implementation of federal institutions in this situation is to give the CU with the predominant ethnic group certain priorities and rights, and a degree of autonomy; thus reducing the tension.

The third assumption is that the issue of resources plays an important role in the demands of the CU for greater independence, and therefore, in influencing the intensity of the conflict. Resources

Obydenkova, Anastassia, "Institutional Tools of Conflict Management - Asymmetrical Federalism in Ethnic-Territorial Conflicts: Quantitative Analysis of Russian Regions", *Peace, Conflict and Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 7, July 2005, available from <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>. can be further subdivided into a few issues: the financial politics of the central government (fiscal policy), the level of the economic development of the region at the start of the transition period (defined by the factories, commercial interests and infrastructure inherited from the Soviet regime), and the existence (or absence) of natural resources (oil, natural gas, diamonds, gold, etc.). The basic correlation is the wealthier the CU, the stronger the demand on the centre for autonomy, and the higher the intensity of the conflict.

***Independent Variables: Geopolitical Conditions, Ethnicity, Level of Economic Development,***

***Geopolitical Conditions*** By "geopolitical factor" I mean the geographical location of constituent units (from now on CUs), their size, and their population. Eleven out of thirty two CUs border another state. These are the Karelian, Altaian, Tyvinian, and Buriatian republics, the republics of the northern Caucasus (with the exception of Adygeya), and the Jewish autonomous oblast. The republic of Sakha and five autonomous oblasts – Nenets, Yamalo—Newest, Taimyr, Chukchi, and Koryak – are situated along the shores of the Arctic Ocean and the Bering Sea. Although they are situated along the coast, climatic conditions deny access by ship for most of the year and reduce the significance of these locations.

The ethnically defined units that border foreign states are, in general, quite small (both in area and population). Altogether, these ten units account for only 10% of the area under ethnic-territorial administration and their share of the population is about 30%.<sup>17</sup> The most populous republics - Tatarstan and Bashkortostan – do not have external borders and are cut off from other states by a belt of oblasts and krajs with an overwhelming Russian population.

***Ethno-demographic factors*** The position of the titular nation in many CUs is quite weak when compared with the other national groups in these areas. The ethnic groups are highly dispersed across the territory of the RF because of the immigration policy of the tsarist period (especially under the rule of Catherine II) and during the Soviet era (most notably during Stalin's period). One

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<sup>17</sup> Their higher percentage in the population is caused by the fact that all the autonomous okrugs, with their sparse populations, belong to ethnic enclaves.

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may be surprised to note that only 2% of all Jews in the RF live in a territorially defined CU called the "Jewish autonomous oblast". The highest percentage of any ethnic group living within their own CU is the Tatars. But even here only 48.9% of the population of Tatarstan is made up of Tatars; the absolute majority is composed of Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, and a mosaic of Caucasian ethnic groups, etc. According to the 1989 census,<sup>18</sup> the titular nation made up less than half of the population in fourteen of the administrative units that are RF republics today. In Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan, a majority exists only if two or more titular groups are added together. It leaves only four republics in which a singular titular nation forms the majority of the population – Chuvashia, Tyva, North Ossetia and Checheno-Ingushetia.

In autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs (which have less autonomy than the republics), the number of members of the titular nation is even smaller. Thus, for example, in the Khanti-Mansi autonomous okrug the two titular groups together account for no more than 1.4% of the total population of this CU. In general, the share of the titular nations in these units is quite low.<sup>19</sup> As a result of Russian and Soviet migration policy, ethnic Russians form a majority in nine of today's twenty one republics, as well as in nine of the eleven units with a lower level of ethnic autonomy. This predominance of Russians is a constraint on potential ethnic separatism. The ethnically defined units have heterogeneous populations. Most of the nationalities that have been granted autonomy are quite small in size. Within the borders of the republics, the size of the titular nation ranges from 1.8 million Tatars to less than 63,000 Khakassians (Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniya SSSR 1991: 34-48). On average, the titular nation accounts for approximately 450,000 inhabitants in the republics, and 25,000 in the other ethnically defined units.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Census 1989 of the RF (ethnic composition of the RF Population) is published in Tishkov, Valerii A. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: the mind aflame*. (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 1997)

<sup>19</sup> The Komi-Permiak autonomous okrug and the two Buryat-inhabited okrugs where the share of the titular nation did not surpass 17% might be considered an exception.

<sup>20</sup> Even these numbers can be considered to certain degree to be an exaggeration because it accounts for the total share of a titular group in each unit, which sometimes include two or more nationalities. The smallest of the ethnic groups with its own administrative-territorial unit is the Evenks (it has 3,500 persons within the borders of this entity).

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Another complicating factor in realising the demands for self-determination is the lack of consistency between the borders of the territory actually inhabited by the minority and their autonomous units. In many cases the ethnically defined units include only a small part of the minority in question. In the case of the largest minority groups with their own territorial units, more than one third of the group lives outside of the autonomous area (*e.g.*, of all Tatars who live in the RF, 68% live outside Tatarstan, among Chuvashs - 49%, Bashkirs – 36%, and Mordvins – 71%). The most striking example are the Jews, 98% of whom live outside their autonomous oblast. It would be bizarre to claim the independence of a federal unit in which the titular ethnic group constitutes only a small percentage and which is actually predominantly inhabited by other ethnic groups. Thus, the numerically weak position of the titular nations, combined with the large number of Russians living in the ethnically defined areas, makes separatist movements based on ethnic exclusivity an unviable option.<sup>21</sup>

The numerically weak position of the titular nations combined with the large number of Russians living in ethnically defined areas makes nationalism based on ethnic exclusivity a less viable option because of its limited potential for success. This, in part, explains why local leaders in many cases have hesitated to 'play' the ethnic card. This is not to say that the ethnic issue is of no importance. The ethnic card is rarely absent in intergovernmental bargaining but it is rarely the motivation for demands for greater autonomy and the reason for the conflict itself.

***Economic factors*** These factors can be described in terms of economic dependence rather than interdependence. Many of the ethnically defined units developed dependence on the centre during the Soviet era. The local economies functioned as integrated parts of the Soviet economy. Planning and investment were always carried out along the framework of one particular region for a particular industry, without developing a balanced, self-sufficient economy within the republic or okrug.

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<sup>21</sup>This is the main reason why the conflicts analyzed in this study would be better defined as "central-peripheral" or "regional" conflicts rather than "ethnic" ones.

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The areas with the greatest potential for the development of fairly independent economies are the Volga-Ural area and northern Siberia, with their rich deposits of oil, gas and other natural resources. But these territories are surrounded by other regions of the RF. On the other hand, the republics which are situated along borders are dependent on subsidies from the federal budget. The republics of northern Caucasus are among the poorest and least developed CUs. The republics of southern Siberia are also highly dependent on transfers of federal funds.<sup>22</sup> Most of the republics can be defined as "mono-economies" in the sense that they rely on imports from other parts of the RF. Thus, for example, 80% of the goods sold in the republics were imported from former union republics. This may explain why initial demands for sovereignty have subsequently been muted. In most of the cases where geopolitical preconditions for independent statehood exist, economic considerations pull in the opposite direction with traditional reliance on federal funds which increased ties with the centre. Separation would probably result in a deterioration in living standards and an increase in economic hardship.

It can be seen from this brief review that, paradoxically, in most of the cases where the geopolitical preconditions for independent statehood exist, economic considerations pull in the opposite direction, with traditional reliance on federal subsidies increasing the strength of ties with the centre.

There are a number of variables that are relevant in only a few cases (for example, political parties in the centre and regions, the nature of the elite in central government and the CUs). Unlike the independent (federal institutions) and contextual variables (economic, ethnic, and geopolitical conditions) that are relevant for all case studies (and for an understanding of the relationship between Moscow and any other CU), other factors do not directly influence the cases under analysis. Thus, the view adopted here is that these variables "intervene" at certain moments in time. One example of such "intervening" of variables is that of the political parties. As a transitional country, the RF has a great number of political parties, whose positions, names, and orientations

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<sup>22</sup> The best example of it is the fact that 90% (!) of expenditure in the Tyvanian budget has been covered by federal subsidies.

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change over time, depending on pre-electoral coalitions. For this reason, it is impossible to consider it as being a consistent factor which has made any difference to the conflicts.

Contextual analysis demonstrates the differences between the CUs of the RF; they are marked by significant differences. The overview of contextual variables explains the asymmetrical federal arrangement. We can see how different federal arrangements helped to reconcile the differences and to mitigate in a conflict situation.

***Dependent Variables: Federal Status*** The 89 CUs all have a different status and, consequently, enjoy distinctive rights and powers. The Constitution is ambiguous in terms of differences of status of CUs. On one hand, it states that all CUs are to be equal while on the other, it includes articles that distinguish some CUs (republics) from others. The constitution of the RF also incorporated three treaties which were signed with CUs granting them a different status:

1. Treaty on Delimiting Subjects of Jurisdiction and Powers Between Federal Agencies of State Power of the RF and agencies of power of the sovereign republics within the RF;

2. Treaty on Delimiting Subjects of Jurisdiction and Powers Between Federal Agencies of State Power of the RF and agencies of power of the territories (krais), regions (oblasts), and Cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg in the RF;

3. Treaty on Delimiting Subjects of Jurisdiction and Powers Between Federal Agencies of State Power of the RF and agencies of power of the Autonomous region (oblast) and Autonomous National Areas (okrugs) within the RF.

These treaties demonstrate the formal hierarchy of the CUs.

According to the 1993 Constitution, the RF is divided into twenty-one republics, fifty-five oblast and krais, one autonomous oblast, and ten autonomous okrugs. Moreover, all the CUs are divided into "ethnic regions" (republics, autonomous oblast, autonomous krais) and "territorial regions"

Obydenkova, Anastassia, "Institutional Tools of Conflict Management - Asymmetrical Federalism in Ethnic-Territorial Conflicts: Quantitative Analysis of Russian Regions", *Peace, Conflict and Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 7, July 2005, available from <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>. (oblasts and kraiss). There are thirty-two CUs defined as "ethnic regions". This group includes twenty-one republics, ten autonomous okrugs and one autonomous oblast.<sup>23</sup>

*Republics* Republics enjoy several advantages over all other CUs, in terms of their relationship with the federal centre. The twenty-one republics provide territorial homes to the most significant ethnic minorities. In most of the cases the titular nation does not amount to a majority and is not dominated by Russians. Not all members of ethnic groups who have their own republics live in their territories. The titular nation amounts to an absolute majority in only five republics<sup>24</sup>. As the most privileged CUs of the RF, republics are empowered to elect their own presidents (only later were kraiss and oblasts allowed to follow in their example). According to the constitution of the RF, the republics are allowed to have their own constitution, while oblasts and kraiss are only permitted charters. Republican authorities signed agreements with federal governments giving them extensive control over natural resources, special tax advantages, and the right to engage in foreign policy.

*Federal cities* The capital city Moscow and the former Tsarist capital St. Petersburg are designated as federal cities.

*Oblasts and Kraiss* Forty-six oblasts and six kraiss are "territorially" divided CUs and there is no difference between them in terms of constitutional rights. The name "krai" was given to the territories that once stood on the furthest boundary of the country.

*Autonomous oblast (AO) and Autonomous okrugs (AOks)* There is only one autonomous oblast in the territory of the RF – Jewish AO. It gained independence from Khabarovsk Krai on 25 March 1991. Therefore, it is to be classified as being equal to any of the oblasts and kraiss. The region was established by Stalin in the Far East as a homeland for the Soviet Union's Jews, most of whom lived in the western part of country and few of whom chose to resettle in the new region. Today's population of Jewish AO is just 2 %.

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<sup>23</sup> For the ethnic composition of thirty two ethnically defined CUs see the *Table 1* (Page 6)

<sup>24</sup> The issue of ethnicity both in the republics and in other constituent units has been discussed in detail on the pages 17-20. See also *Table 1* on Page 18.

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Not all AOKs are similar regarding their status and actual rights. For example, the resource rich autonomous okrugs (Khanty-Mansiisk and Yamalo-Nenets) have long sought independence from the region of which they are a part and, finally, they were given a number of privileges distinguishing them from other CU with the same status. This fact was taken into account in the system of indexes.

There are also ten autonomous okrugs and one autonomous oblast. The constitution of the RF is very ambiguous with regard to the status of these CUs. Article 5 says that they are equal to the other eighty-nine units. However, Article 66 subordinates them to oblast or krai on whose territory they are located. The Russian Constitutional Court refused to clarify this ambiguity on 14 July 1997. All okrugs are designated for specific ethnic groups. The titular nation constitutes a majority only in Komi-Permyak AOK and in Agin-Buryat AOK.

### 3. *Quantitative Analysis: Study of Contextual variables and Federal Asymmetry across 89 regions of the RF*

We shall now look at the correlation between all of the variables, and then run regression analysis. A first observation is, the more wealthy a region, the higher its autonomy (H1.1). Secondly, I assume that geopolitical factors – population, size, external border - have influence on the status of the CU (H.1.2). Thirdly, the larger the percentage of an ethnic group, the higher the level of autonomy of the CU (H.1.3). The results are presented in *Table 1*.

*Table 1: Correlation of “contextual” variables and federal arrangement*

	Economy	Population	Size	External Border	Ethnicity
Economy	-	-	-	-	-
Population	.504**	-	-	-	-
Size	.094	-.004	-	-	-
External Border	-.089	-.084	-.058	-	-

Ethnicity	- .483**	- .249**	- .043	- .018	-
Federal Status	- .063	.039	- .043	.124	.415**

\*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05

*Table 1* Demonstrates a very low correlation between federal status and such factors as external border, population, size, and economic development. However, it demonstrates the strong positive correlation between the ethnic factor and the federal status (+ .415\*\*), confirming the hypothesis stating that the asymmetrical federal arrangement (measured by the hierarchy of the CUs in the constitution) is influenced by some contextual factors. We have to reject the sub-hypothesis on the more or less significant impact of economic and geopolitical factors on the hierarchy of the CUs.

We have run regression on the dependent variable, federal status, with predictors of the ethnicity (as measured by the percentage of titular nation within CU), size (sq. km.), and a dummy variable of external border, population and the economic rank for 2000. The regression analysis confirms the impact of ethnicity on the formation of federal asymmetry.

*Table 2:* Dependent variable: Federal Status of the CUs (Regression analysis)

	Beta	(t-test)
Constant	-	(10.869)
Economy Rank (2000)	.157	(1.245)
Population	.094	(.820)
Size	-.026	(-.264)
External border	.151	(1.513)
Ethnicity	.490**	(4.384)

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level

The regression analysis demonstrated the R Square is .206, F-test is 4.208 and the model is significant at .002. Among all independent variables only ethnicity has a significant Beta (.490) and t-test (4.384) and is significant at 0.01, which allows us to reject the hypothesis that socio-economic and geopolitical parameters had any influence on the formation of the federal state.

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Although it is not the aim of the current study to analyse the interrelations of independent variables, the correlation among the contextual factors appears interesting. We have found a strong correlation between the contextual variables themselves (like for example, the one between economic development and population (+ .504\*\*). This may be explained by the fact that the CUs with the highest populations tend to be more economically developed. And, there is a strong negative correlation between the percentage of an ethnic group living within the region and economic development (- .483\*\*). This allows us to conclude that the ethnically defined regions tend to be economically dependent on the centre. The republics of northern Caucasus are among the poorest and least developed CUs. The republics of southern Siberia are also highly dependent on transfers of federal funds.<sup>25</sup> Most of the republics can be defined as "mono-economies", in the sense that they rely on imports from other parts of the RF. This might be partially explained by the historical legacy: during the Soviet era, economic policy was aimed at developing regional dependence (especially those ethnically defined regions) on the centre. However, other contextual variables (for example, the size of CU and the existence of external border) proved to play no significant role in attaining high or low federal status.

***How are contextual variables correlated with autonomy (federal status)?*** The analysis demonstrated a low correlation between all three geopolitical factors and the economic influence. However, the strong correlation between the percentage size of ethnic group and federal status (+ .415\*\*) confirmed the hypothesis stating that the asymmetrical federal arrangement was an *answer* to the ethnic issue in regions under transition and, *in this sense*, asymmetry was "caused" by ethnic factor.

To sum up, the regression analysis exhibits the following impact of "contextual" variables on the established hierarchy of the status of regions:

$$\text{Federal Status} = 0.49 \text{ Ethnicity} + 0.15 \text{ External border} + 0.16 \text{ Economy}$$

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<sup>25</sup> The best example of it is the fact that 90% (!) of expenditure in the Tuvanian budget is covered by federal subsidies

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Both correlation and regression analysis confirm the first main assumption of the interconnection of disparity across regions and asymmetrical federal arrangement as the only possible method of accommodating so many different regions within one state. Thus, ethnic groups have been taken into account and ethnicity was a dominant factor in the establishment of an asymmetrical federation.

#### IV. Conclusion

Does the analysis mean that the less the autonomy (and, thus, a smaller degree of asymmetry) attained by CUs in a country experiencing a regime change, the greater the opportunity of democratisation within the CUs (given that federal government is democracy oriented itself)? How much autonomy can be granted to the local governments so as not to damage the fragile nascent democratic institutions and thus prevent the local elite from authorising power in the regions?

Contextual variables help to demonstrate the distinctions among the CUs of the RF, along three main parameters: geopolitical, economical and ethnic. They do have an impact in instigating conflict within centre-peripheral relations. In other words, it is the *conflict per se*, not the *intensity* of the conflict that is determined by contextual factors. The size, the population, the existence of external borders, the natural resources, and the ethnic factor all stimulate the CU to bargain for more independence. But, once negotiation has started and the asymmetrical arrangement within the area becomes mutually acceptable, the intensity of the conflict changes, not just according to contextual variables, but it is also influenced by possible fiscal arrangements, by the nature of the elites, and even by interpersonal relations with the head of the country<sup>26</sup>.

Although the question of the interrelation between federalism and democratisation remains, we can conclude the following. First, one of the factors that explains why federal structure is one of the most popular frameworks in conflict management, especially in a country in transition, is that it can

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<sup>26</sup> This statement is applied only to the RF and is one of the properties of regime transition which is this particular to this country. Thus, it can not be extrapolated for other countries in transition. Such factors, as the nature of elites, analysis of fiscal policy, and fiscal arrangements are the subject of a separate research.

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ensure the rights of minorities, which had previously been suppressed by totalitarian, authoritarian or other form of undemocratic regime. Federalism can accomplish these goals because it provides for two or more overlapping jurisdictions, each with substantial autonomy but each subject to an enforceable system of constitutional law. Power can be decentralised to various forms of local government, but, if the relationship with the national government is strong, it will keep the country together and prevent secession. By contrast, a unitary system is less effective in this sense. Its structure consists of one jurisdiction in which the will of the majority can dominate the polity. Federalism allows more avenues for policy articulation, more institutional remedies for problems, fewer overall demands, and thus less chance for so-called 'open' (or violent) conflict. On the other hand, one cannot deny that the federal system is more complex and less efficient as far as the policy implementation of the central government is concerned, and it is subject to higher levels of conflict and regional competition.

Secondly, federal institutions alone do not guarantee success in conflict management and in the consolidation of democracy in the regions. The federal principle is itself partially influenced by ethnic, economic, and geopolitical factors and needs to be reinforced by other factors, both societal and institutional.

To sum up, federalism is not the only factor that influences conflict mitigation in the state. The effects of federalism depend greatly on the institutional structure and contextual conditions. Although federalism does not guarantee absolute conflict resolution, it is difficult to find any other form of successful accommodation of multi-national state (or so-called "divided society") that does not involve federal principle. Federalism does not prevent or eliminate conflicts, but it does make them more manageable.

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